

JOB 4–25

Job 4

Eliphaz breaks his silence and “tries a word” (Job 4:2) with Job. How we determine Eliphaz’s tone makes all the difference in understanding Eliphaz’s intent. We can read Eliphaz’s words as accusatory, or we can read them as encouraging. For example, in Job 4:3–5 Eliphaz looks back on Job’s past behavior and compares it to what is happening in the moment. He speaks of Job’s righteous actions and how his “words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees” (verse 4). He then contrasts that with what is happening right now: “But now it is come upon thee and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled” (verse 5).

We can read Eliphaz’s words in the same tone as that of those who taunted the Savior, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save,”¹ but we could also read them as being more charitable and encouraging for Job. Eliphaz knows that Job has spent his life lifting others in difficult times and reassures him: “Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?” (verse 6). This might be more clearly translated as, “Is not your fear (of God) your confidence? Is not your hope the integrity of your ways?”

These two attributes—his relationship with God and his integrity²—are what the narrator tells us about in Job 1:1 and what God confirms in His conversations with Satan (1:8; 2:3). Eliphaz’s words could be seen in a reassuring light, telling Job that his own personal conduct will see him through this hard time as he reminds him, “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous

¹ Mark 16:31. For this reading, see E. G. King, *The Poem of Job: Translated in the Metre of the Original* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1914), quoted in David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 123.

² The word translated as “integrity” in Job 4:6 comes from the same root as the word translated as “perfect” in Job 1:1.

cut off?” (4:7). From one perspective, this might seem comforting: Job just needs to stay the course and everything will turn out fine. However, for Job, whose children just perished, it could imply that they got what they deserved.

Eliphaz recounts to Job a vision he had in which he heard a voice saying, “Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?” (verse 17). If God charges even his angels with folly (see verse 18), Eliphaz seems to imply, Job has surely done something wrong to warrant the current situation. His general tone seems to be one of encouragement, suggesting that regardless of what Job has done to get himself into his current situation, he should continue to move forward in his relationship with God and hold to his integrity. Eliphaz’s encouragement seems to be well-intentioned and can certainly be useful, but Eliphaz mistakenly believes that Job’s afflictions are the result of his mistakes.

Job 5

This is the continuation of Eliphaz’s first reply to Job. He contrasts those who do not trust in God (verses 1–7) with those who do (verses 8–27). Eliphaz asks Job, “To which of the saints wilt thou turn?” This probably refers to the members of the divine council (Job 1:6). Eliphaz suggests that only the foolish would rely on someone other than God Himself. Eliphaz outlines the fate of the foolish, saying, “His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them” (verse 4). Eliphaz either is implying Job’s children have suffered because of Job’s sins or isn’t taking Job’s situation into consideration and is instead making general remarks. Eliphaz encourages Job to “seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause” (verse 8). Eliphaz believes that God will ultimately rescue the poor and give them hope (verses 15–16) and that “happy is the man whom God correcteth.” Thus he encourages Job to “despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (verse 17). Eliphaz implies that Job has done something wrong and that God is teaching him through suffering. From Eliphaz’s perspective, everything will turn out as long as Job takes this correction to heart.

Although we might find some commendable parts of Eliphaz’s encouragement, the narrative itself makes Eliphaz’s position untenable since we as readers know that neither Job nor his children are suffering for anything they have done wrong. In this sense, what has happened to Job is not God’s correction or chastening. The idea that all suffering in life can be avoided through righteous living is patently false. Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless life, spent his life “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). We learn that even though Jesus Christ was God’s Son, “yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus’s life, even though it was difficult, was a learning experience. Jesus’s righteousness did not shield him from suffering. In fact, his suffering often came because he was righteous; rescuing God’s children from sin and sorrow is not an easy task. For Job and all of us, there

will always be much to learn while we experience suffering, but this does not mean that we suffer for that reason. Even though Job was righteous, he still had much to learn. Our Heavenly Father is willing to teach us during all our afflictions, regardless of the reason they happen.

Job 6

As Job replies to Eliphaz, we continue to feel Job's intense pain. Job wishes there was a way to measure pain (Job 6:1) and believes that his would be heavier than the sands of the sea (verse 2). Job is physically, mentally, and emotionally in rough shape. In verses 8–9, his sole request is that God finish him off. Eliphaz, to his credit, encourages Job to continue to rely on God (4:6; 5:8), but Job is not sure he can endure his pain any longer. He asks, "What is my strength, that I should hope? . . . Is my strength the strength of stones? Or is my flesh of brass?" (6:11–12). In verses 14–30, Job rebukes Eliphaz and his companions. He argues that "to him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend" (verse 14). He compares his friends to seasonal streams who disappear when they are needed (verses 15–21). Eliphaz has politely accused Job of sin, and Job challenges his friends to show him his iniquity because he does not believe that he has sinned (verses 28–30).

Job's words are born out of pain. He believes that God has turned against him and sees no way out. He looks for comfort from his friends but finds none. Even though Eliphaz's words may have been well-intentioned, he was ultimately speaking of things about which he had no idea. Eliphaz's words focused on Job's possible past (for example, his alleged sins) or Job's possible future (for example, his continued faithfulness), but he ultimately failed to see the Job that was present. Job feels forsaken by God, and now he feels forsaken by his friends.

Job 7

In Job 7, Job shifts from addressing his friends to addressing God. In verses 1–10, Job makes the argument that life is brutal and short. For Job, humankind has been given a difficult task, like a servant or hireling, but there just doesn't seem to be rest (verses 1–4). Before we know it, we are gone and forgotten (verses 6–10). For this reason, Job says, "I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (verse 11).

Job asks, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest watch over me?" (verse 12). The word that is translated as "whale" should probably be translated as "dragon" or "sea monster." In the Old Testament, Jehovah is said to go to battle against the sea and against the monsters that live within it. In Psalm 74:12–13 the psalmist says, "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the

waters.” The sea and its monsters are symbols of sin and death. Thus, in Revelation Satan is symbolized as a “great dragon” (Revelation 12:9), and heaven will be a place where there is “no more sea” (Revelation 21:1). Job is wondering how he became so dangerous that he warrants as much divine attention as God gives to the sea and its monsters. He is not able to find rest because he feels that God “scarest me with dreams and terrifies me through visions” (Job 7:14).

Job 7:17–21 can be read as a cynical reinterpretation of Psalm 8. In Psalm 8, David wonders in gratitude and thanksgiving, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (verse 4). Whereas Job, who wants more than anything for God to look away, asks, “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?” (Job 7:17). All Job wants is enough time to swallow his own spit, saying, “How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle?” (verse 19). Job wonders why God takes such an active interest in punishing those who sin and wonders what effect his actions even have on God: “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?” (verse 20).

Job is in pain and feels betrayed by both his friends and God. Rather than “curse God and die” (Job 2:9) or walk away from his relationship with God, he engages with God and is frank and honest about how he feels. Job may share thoughts and feelings that are not always constructive, but in the end, his wrestle leads to a renewed relationship with God and his friends.

Job 8

Job’s friends take turns answering Job, and now it is Bildad’s turn. Bildad seems less encouraging than Eliphaz and is more frustrated with Job’s stubbornness. He balks at the idea that God would do something that Job didn’t deserve and asks, “Doth God pervert judgment? Or doth the Almighty pervert justice?” (Job 8:3). Bildad assumes that Job’s children have been punished for their sins but believes that there is still time for Job to pray and be restored to favor (verses 4–7). Bildad promises that “thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase” (verse 7).

What is interesting is that Bildad’s prediction comes true, but not for the reasons that Bildad thinks. Bildad thinks Job needs to repent and then things will turn out well for him. However, Job’s trials are not the result of his sins, iniquities, or even inadvertent mistakes, so Bildad’s encouragement is misguided. However, Job does repent before the end of the book (42:6), but of what? If we see repentance as changing our lives based on our relationship with God, then Job’s future surely hinges on his holding onto his relationship with God.

Job doesn't get his happy ending until he decides to trust God and forgive his friends, even though God has left his questions unanswered and his friends hurt him in his hour of need. In some ways, Job chooses to forgive both God and his friends without expecting his circumstances to change. It is only after that moment that he gets his happy ending. When he chooses relationships based on trust and forgiveness, things work out; in this way, we might read the story of Job as an illustration of Jesus's teaching that "whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). Job spends much of the book trying to "save his life" by proving his innocence and demanding answers, but eventually he chooses to trust and forgive, giving up on a life that demands answers and certainty. When Job chooses to "lose his life," he finds it.

Job 9

In answering Bildad, Job continues to concentrate on his own standing before God. Job asks, "How should man be just with God?" (Job 9:2). Job feels that he is righteous but does not believe that he could win a court case against God. Job outlines God's power and might in verses 3–13 and wonders, "How much less shall I answer him, and choose out my words to reason with him?" (verse 14). Job feels God's violent actions against him have shown how God will respond if they meet (verses 16–18).

Job feels that his attempts to defend himself will be self-defeating, saying, "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me" (verse 20). Job's own experience leads him to declare that God "destroyeth the perfect and the wicked" and that God "will laugh at the trial of the innocent" (verses 22–23). Job feels that all order in the world has been lost (verse 23) and that his days are passing swiftly and futilely (verses 25–31). He ends the chapter wishing he could face God in a courtroom and that it could be a fair trial (verses 32–25).

At this point, Job is fixated on the fact that his relationship with God is broken and that it is not his fault. He wants to sit down with God, prove that he is innocent, and prove that God has been mistreating him. The book of Job is extremely complex. From our perspective, it might be easy to argue alongside Job since we know that Job is indeed innocent, and we might not be altogether convinced that Job's treatment is warranted. However, Job's approach is incorrect because he believes that as long as he obeys all the rules, life should be free of pain and suffering. He believes that his relationship with God should be more or less transactional. Job's views about his relationship with God change by the end of the book. If we are going to find something commendable in what Job is saying here, we should notice that he wants to commune with God rather than argue with his friends about God.

Job 10

Job moves from his reply to Bildad to a prayer to God. In arguing with his friends, Job realizes that above all else, he wants a chance to talk to God. Job turns to God and pleads, “Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2). Job demands answers so he can understand what has been happening to him. Job asserts that “Thou knowest that I am not wicked” (verse 7) and questions what God is trying to discover by bringing these afflictions upon him (verses 3–6, 8–13). Job is baffled by the treatment he has received, has difficulty seeing a difference between righteous and wicked behavior, and implores God to “see thou mine affliction” (verse 15). Job expresses to God that he wishes that he had not been born (verses 18–19; see chapter 3) and feels that life is short and hard enough that God should let up on him (verses 20–22).

This seems to be a step in the right direction for Job. He takes all of his questions and his frustrations and directly confronts God about them rather than argue with his friends about them. Even though Job may have been angry and accusatory, it’s always better to pray. In a video produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints titled “God Wants You to Pray | His Grace,” a woman named Kayla illustrates this principle.³ She tells how after a long period of refusing to talk to God, “I let it all out. I yelled. I said, ‘I’m angry. I don’t want to talk to you.’” She found that even this angry prayer brought her peace and realized that “if I felt peace yelling at God in my prayers, that must mean that he’s happy I’m talking to him.” Choosing to pray is always a step in the right direction (see 2 Nephi 32:8).

Job 11

Zophar, the last of Job’s three friends, now takes his turn to address Job. Zophar, like his friends, assumes that Job is suffering as a result of something he has done and sees his position bolstered by what Job has been saying. Zophar seems to be responding specifically to Job’s prayer and paraphrases it as “my doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes” (Job 11:4). Zophar finds this ridiculous and hopes that “God would speak and open his lips against thee” (verse 5). Zophar claims to know that “God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (verse 6). Zophar argues that Job knows nothing of what God knows and couldn’t ever hope to (verses 7–13). Zophar closes with an appeal to Job to repent of what he has done so that he can live in safety without fear (verses 14–20).

Zophar’s argument is ironic since he claims that God is unsearchable. Zophar says, “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” (verse 7), yet he claims to know exactly what is going on between Job and God. Perhaps if Zophar took this proverb to heart, he might be less likely to pass judgment on Job.

³ “God Wants You to Pray | His Grace,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, video, 3:29, September 17, 2020, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=abI47Nf2uCg>.

Job 12

Job does not back down from his claim and asserts that he knows as much as his friends (Job 12:3). In this section, Job puts the responsibility for his problems on God's shoulders. He says, "I am as one mocked of his neighbor. . . . The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure" (verses 4, 6). He claims that everyone, even the animals and all of Creation, know that God is behind this, asking, "Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (verse 9). Job then gives examples of how God has the power to do as He pleases in verses 10–25.

Job suggests that God is not maintaining order and that He is allowing the wicked to prosper and Job to be afflicted despite his righteousness. He does not see how anyone could argue that God is not responsible since He is the one in control of the world. Job's perspective is one that many people have grappled with over time. How could there be so much evil and suffering in the world when we believe there is a just God? This is a question that is not ultimately answered by the book of Job, nor does Job himself come to understand it. However, one thing that the book of Job does not properly account for in this chapter is human agency. God has created a world that allows His creations to make choices, both good and bad, and this was part of the plan since the premortal realm, where this aspect in particular seemed to cause quite a stir. However, despite the danger, we still chose to come to earth; no one was forced to come. Does blaming God for everything that has gone wrong not cheapen our own agency and our own choice to come down into mortality? Can we expect God to have total responsibility when we choose to reject our own individual and collective responsibilities?

Job 13

In this chapter, Job directly challenges his friends and repeats his challenge to God. His friends initially came "to mourn with [Job] and to comfort him" (Job 2:11). This was an admirable intent: Job certainly needed friends. However, now that each one of the three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) has had a chance to offer comfort, Job is able to declare, "Ye are all physicians of no value" (13:4). Rather than attempt to understand what Job has experienced (a prerequisite to mourning with him), they have provided their diagnosis and cure. Aside from the fact that their diagnoses and cures were wrong, it was also not what Job needed. Their care, friendship, and love would have provided a more effective healing balm than doctrinal musings.

In fact, Job feels that they have inappropriately taken sides in a conflict between him and God. Job asks them, "Will ye speak wickedly for God? And talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? Will ye contend for God?" (verses 7–8). Job sees the conflict between him and God like a court case, and he accuses his friends of being respecters of persons (see Acts 10:34; Moroni 8:12). In other words, he accuses

them of siding with God before they hear the arguments or the case. He accuses them of saying things that are untrue in order to defend God's honor. Job reminds them that accepting persons in any other setting would lead to dire consequences (verses 10–11).

Job asks his friends to leave him alone and let him make his case to God because he is willing to bear the result of his court case (verses 13–16). Job feels that his only chance at a change in fortune is a chance to meet God in a courtroom; he feels that inaction is not an option since “if I hold my tongue, I shall give up the ghost” (verse 19). Despite the fact that Job feels that God is killing him as he speaks (verse 15), Job intends to “maintain my own ways before him” (verse 15), or rather, to argue his case before God.

Job then turns from Zophar and addresses God directly. He demands that God “withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid” (verse 21). After God has stopped afflicting Job, then their conversation can commence and Job can ask God, “How many are mine iniquities and sins?” (verse 23).

Job 14

Job 14 is an extended version of Job's request in Job 13:21 that God stop afflicting Job. Job's main argument is that life is short and hard enough without having the most powerful being in the universe trying to make it more difficult (14:1–6).

In Job 14:7, Job says, “For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.” Job contrasts that with humankind, where “man lieth down, and riseth not: till heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep” (verse 12). Job wishes that God would “hide [Job] in the grave” and then when God's anger has passed that he could then come out and face God (verses 13–15). In Job 14:18–22, Job expressed little hope that he could outlast God, for “the waters wear stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man” (verse 19).

Job's views about the human condition after death seem quite pessimistic from our perspective. There are a few ways that we can read this. First, at this point in the book, because of Job's mental and physical state, many things that he says are not entirely accurate. Job has said many things that reflect his current state of hopeless and suffering, and this might be one of those. However, Job's words are not entirely out of character with discussions about death in both Psalms and Ecclesiastes. For example, in Psalm 6:4–6 the psalmist pleads for Jehovah to save his life, “for in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” In Ecclesiastes, we are told to enjoy good food, clean clothes, and family because “there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest”

(9:7–10). We can read all these as focusing on humanity’s mortal life, that we only live once as mortals and should enjoy and make the best of it.

Scholars usually read passages like this as evidence that there was no belief in a resurrection for most of the Old Testament (except Daniel 12:1–2). For Latter-day Saints, it is not entirely clear how to interpret these scriptures. Because Latter-day Saints believe in continuing revelation, it is not necessary that past dispensations have the same views and beliefs that we do. After all, the Book of Mormon does not teach the three degrees of glory but assumes a sharp line between heaven and hell. Just because we now believe in resurrection is not a guarantee that Saints in times past did as well. On the other hand, we also have to be careful. Even though our evidence for a belief in resurrection is limited in the Old Testament, that does not mean that they did not believe in it; it just means that evidence is limited. It is clear in Job 14 that Job wishes that he could go to the grave and come out when all the trouble has blown over. Job appears to be hoping for something like resurrection to happen.

Job 15

Job 15–21 represents the second round of speeches between Job and his three friends. Eliphaz continues much of the same arguments that he began in Job 4–5 but is perhaps less kind now. Eliphaz considers Job’s speech to be “vain knowledge” and “unprofitable talk” (Job 15:2, 3). Eliphaz feels that Job has lost his relationship with God (“castest off fear” [verse 4]) and that Job’s own “mouth condemneth [him]” (verse 6). Eliphaz accuses Job of claiming to be wiser than them or anyone (verses 7–10). Eliphaz turns to the arguments he brought up earlier, asking, “What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (verse 14). Eliphaz assumes that since humanity is so weak and so prone to error, no one can claim to be innocent. He again emphasizes that God doesn’t even trust His angels: “He putteth no trust in saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight” (verse 15). How could He trust humanity, who “drinketh iniquity like water?” (verse 16). Eliphaz holds that the wicked will get what is coming to them (verses 20–35).

Eliphaz has a valid point: it’s almost impossible to know that anyone is entirely without fault. Yet, what makes this entire exchange between Job and his friends so interesting and full of irony is that we know Job is not being punished for iniquity since God Himself has confirmed that he is a righteous person (1:8). Eliphaz assumes that every misfortune in life is the result of humans’ imperfection or insufficiency or uncleanness. This way of looking at the world assumes that if we are completely perfect, then we can avoid misfortune entirely. The irony of the book of Job is that Job believes the same thing and wants to hold God accountable for violating this worldview. Job assumes that God is to blame for afflicting him for no reason, and Eliphaz assumes that Job is to blame for unrighteousness. Juxtaposing Eliphaz’s and Job’s

perspectives should make the reader highly suspicious of both worldviews. It begs the question, if righteousness is not about avoiding suffering, then what is it about? For one thing, perhaps, Eliphaz should realize that righteousness may be more about alleviating the suffering of others than assigning blame.

Job 16

Job calls it like he sees it and tells his friends, “Miserable comforters are ye all” (Job 16:2). Job’s friends came comfort him (2:11), but they have done a poor job. Perhaps in their minds they are telling Job what he needs to hear to fix his problems, but they are wrong in both their diagnoses and their prescriptions. Job tells them that if he were in their place, “I would strengthen you with my mouth and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief” (16:5). Job wishes that their words would do this since his own have not helped (verse 6).

In Job 16:7–17, Job describes how God has attacked him and delivered him to the wicked—and not for anything Job has done. Job declares that “my witness is in heaven and my record is on high” (verse 19). It is not entirely clear whom Job is referring to in this passage. Perhaps he remains confident that despite God’s actions against him, God knows what is really going on. Some have wondered if he believes that a member of the divine council (for example, one of the sons of God from Job 1–2) will take note. Either way, Job believes or hopes that there is someone in heaven, whether a member of the divine council (namely, Jesus Christ) or Heavenly Father, who will take notice of him. By the time we get to Job 19, Job believes that there will be someone, a redeemer, who will set right his relationship with God (19:25).

Job 17

Job continues to describe his suffering and how God and his friends have turned against him, and he changes his address between God and his friends. Job assumes that the way his friends are treating him is God’s doing as well. He asks, “Are there not mockers with me?” and he tells God that “thou hast hid their heart from understanding” (Job 17:2, 4). Job’s eye “is dim by reason of sorrow; and all my members are as a shadow” (verse 7), and Job assumes that someone being in such a state should provoke the righteous to stand strong and help (verses 8–9). Because of the reaction of his friends, Job asserts, “I cannot find one wise man among you” (verse 10). Job wonders where he will find hope; if he cannot find hope and solace from his friends, he is certainly not going to find it in the grave (verses 11–16).

Job 18

Job 18 is Bildad’s second response to Job. Rather than understand the pain and confusion that Job is experiencing, Bildad finds offense because he feels that “we are counted as beasts, and reputed vile in

[Job's] sight" (Job 18:3). Bildad outlines the eventual fate of the wicked as a light that will be put out and a spark that will not shine (verse 5). Bildad argues that the wicked's "remembrance shall perish" and that all Job's posterity will cease and be left desolate (verses 17, 19–21). Bildad's speech is about "the wicked," but since Bildad refers so often to "him" and "he," the reader easily assumes that he is just talking about Job. Perhaps Bildad feels that if he reminds Job of his eventual end, Job might repent.

Job 19

Job continues to point out the harsh treatment of his friends, and he reminds his friends that the situation is between him and God alone. He reminds them that "be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth within myself" (Job 19:4). If they continue to insist upon Job's error, he wants them to know that "God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net" (verse 6). Because of God's actions, "behold I cry out wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment" (verse 7). Job says that God "counteth me unto him as one of his enemies" (verse 11). He feels that God has estranged him from his family, household, community, and friends (verses 13–20). Job pleads with his friends not to turn on him as God has turned on him, saying, "Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?" (verse 22).

Job wishes that his plight were written down on scroll (verse 23 of the King James Version translates this as "printed in a book") or that his story were written into rock like a monumental inscription. Both a scroll and inscription would preserve Job's story until one day someone would take up Job's case on his behalf. Job expresses confidence that someone will come to make things right when he states, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (verse 25). A redeemer in the Old Testament usually referred to a family member or close kin who would free another family member from slavery or purchase ancestral property in order to keep it in the family. For this reason, Jehovah is considered the redeemer of Israel; He is a close kinsman who rescued Israel from slavery, but instead of buying Israel with money, He rescued them with a strong hand (Exodus 4:22; 6:6). Job knows that someone will come after him and finally fix this dispute between him and God.

Because of the reconciliation that this redeemer will provide, Job expresses confidence that his earlier hope will come true, that when all of this has blown over, God will take him out of the grave and be reconciled. Now, Job does not say who this redeemer is; only he knows and hopes that he will come to make things right. Job's hope beautifully foreshadows the role and mission of Jesus Christ, one of our close kinsmen in the family God who will come to earth in order to reconcile the irreconcilable problems of our times—and give Job the happy ending that he wants. Things do not go exactly how Job wants or expects them to, but he will see God and reconcile their relationship while he is still a mortal. Job in his suffering expresses the need of a redeemer to heal those who suffer in mortality and to mend our most important relationships.

Job 20

Zophar responds to Job for the second time, but like those of his other friends, his answer moves away from Job's specific situation or needs and moves to reaffirming Zophar's way of seeing the world. Zophar's worldview does not allow Job to be both innocent and suffering, so Zophar describes to Job the fate of the wicked. Zophar believes that "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment" (Job 20:4) and that even though the wicked may "mount up to the heavens" or "reach unto the clouds," eventually "he shall perish for ever like his own dung" (verses 6–7).

Zophar believes that the wicked always end up eventually getting what is coming to them. If that were all what Zophar is saying, it would be difficult to argue with. However, he is using this to imply that Job finally has gotten what has been coming to him and unless he repents, his future is grim. Zophar has lost sight of the relationship he should have with Job. Zophar has taken it upon himself to be Job's judge, bringing to mind Jesus's admonition to "judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Matthew 7:1–2). Jesus teaches us that how we treat others will ultimately be a reflection of how God will treat us. This same principle is taught in Matthew 6:14: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Now, certainly there may be those in our lives that we love dearly and wish to offer some counsel or correction, in which case we should remember Doctrine and Covenants 121:43–44. One of the problems for Zophar is that he takes Job's circumstances and derives hypothetical problems rather than addressing real problems that he has seen.

Job 21

Job reminds Zophar that his problem is between him and God: "As for me, is my complaint to man?" (Job 21:4). But he still argues against Zophar's assertion that the wicked get their just rewards. Job finds it frustrating and unfair that the wicked are not always punished in mortality. In Job 21:7–16, Job describes the pleasant and unbothered lives of the wicked. They have many children and their houses are safe, their livestock produces well, and they sing and dance (verses 8–13). Job says that the wicked have no need of God and wonder "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (verse 15). In Job 21:17–21, Job wonders why God does not punish the wicked in their own lifetimes and have the wicked people themselves experience the punishment rather than their children. This sentiment is obscured in the King James Version. Job 21:19–21 in the Common English Bible reads, "God stores up his punishment for his children. Let him destroy them so they know. Let their own eyes witness their doom. Let them drink from the Almighty's wrath. What do they care about their household after they die, when their numbered days are cut off?"

Job and his friends are very focused on what happens in mortality. Zophar uses how people fare in life as a barometer for their righteousness, and Job is frustrated with God because He lets the wicked off the hook while Job seems to be punished for his own righteousness.

Job 22

Eliphaz responds to Job for the third and final time. He begins with the question “Can a man be profitable unto God?” (Job 22:2). This is an interesting question. It is the same one pondered by King Benjamin in Mosiah 2. King Benjamin came to a negative answer: “I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants” (Mosiah 2:21). The purpose of King Benjamin’s words is not to declare God’s aloofness from us nor His unaffected nature but rather to point out the fact that the King of the world spends His life in service of His own creations—not because we are “profitable” but because He loves us. This point serves two purposes: It is meant to show God’s love for us and that He loves us because we are His children, not because of our economic benefit to him. On the other hand, His service to us and our debt to Him is supposed to underscore our obligation to each other. When we accept our debt to Him, we spend our lives engaged in His service, serving and loving others regardless of what they do to benefit us. Rather than pay God back, we pay it forward.

Eliphaz, however, does not ask this question to move us to consider God’s love for us and our duty to love others; Eliphaz asks this question to disconnect God from humanity. He follows this up by asking, “Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?” (Job 22:3). Perhaps Eliphaz wishes to emphasize to Job that God does not stand to receive profits on Job’s righteousness. However, if we understand being righteous not as punctilious rule-following but as building healthy relationships by showing care for the well-being of others, then surely God does need our righteousness. There are people who need love, care, food, and shelter, and God relies on us to make these things happen. Our own relationship with God is predicated on our feeding, clothing, and visiting others (Mosiah 4).

Surely our righteousness does not put profit in God’s pocket any more than small children can put money in a parent’s bank account. But to say that God is unaffected by our righteousness or our wickedness is to go too far. To use the analogy of parents, surely parents do not need their children to pay for their food and clothing, but they do need children to show love for each other. In the same way, God does not need a return on His investment, but He does need our care for each other if He is to make this world a better place.

Eliphaz goes on to accuse Job of committing specific crimes for which he is suffering. He asks, “Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?” (Job 22:5).

Job 23

In this reply, Job seems to tire of addressing his friends directly and reiterates what he really wants: an audience with God. Job exclaims, “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!” (Job 23:3). This desire to face God and argue his case gives Job hope, for “there the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge” (verse 7). Although Job as yet “cannot behold him,” Job is confident that he will “come forth as gold,” because “my foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept” (verses 9–11). Despite Job’s confidence and his demand for a trial, he still feels “troubled at this presence” and is afraid of God (verse 15).

Job 24

Job spends much of this chapter outlining the wickedness in this world that seems to go unpunished. After outlining many examples, Job comments, “Yet God layeth not folly to them” (Job 24:12). In Job 24:17–24, Job seems to make a very different argument. Here Job says that the grave will take sinners just as “drought and heat consume the snow waters” (verse 19), which seems to suggest the inevitable fate of sinners who “are exalted for a little while” (verse 24). Commentators still wrestle with explaining the change from the first half of the chapter to the second half. It may be that Job, as before, is upset that judgment does not come sooner but must wait until the wickedness has long since transpired and the innocent have long since suffered.

Job 25

Bildad’s third and final reply to Job is quite short. This has prompted some scholars to argue that earlier versions of the book may have been corrupted during copying and transmission. Not only is Bildad’s reply uncharacteristically short, Zophar is not given a third speech, and some of Job’s final responses sound like they should come from his friends instead. These are certainly possibilities, but our responsibility is to read the text as it stands and do our best to make sense of it.

Bildad does his best to defend God’s power by noting that “he maketh peace in his high places” (Job 25:2). This may be a concession that all might not be how it should be on earth, but at least things are peaceful in heaven. There is truth to this statement since Jesus’s own model prayer says, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). If God’s will were always done on earth, there would be no reason to pray for it to be done.

Bildad then goes back to an important theme in the book of Job: “How can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4). Bildad claims that if even the celestial bodies

are not pure, much less so the mortal bodies of humanity (verses 5–6). Bildad’s view of the world requires demanding and exacting perfectionism. In Bildad’s view, how could humanity ever not warrant punishment? If we warrant punishment when we are less than perfect in God’s sight, Bildad wonders, how could we ever claim that we don’t deserve what we get? This kind of argument assumes the kind of God that Job has been terrified of for most of the book: a God who punishes those who make mistakes, holding us to an exacting standard. Job feels that he cannot catch a break because of God’s punishment. In this view, the only safety from suffering is perfect obedience, but because this is unattainable, we should accept that our suffering is the result of our imperfections and continue to try harder.

This view of the world is ultimately unhelpful. We sometimes fall into this trap when we view repentance in this way; we see the goal of our lives as being perfect, and we see any misfortune in our lives as a product of this imperfection and a call to repentance. We then try to be more obedient in order to stave off further problems and come closer to perfection. Such a perspective is ultimately selfish and too inwardly focused for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself was confronted with this perspective when a rich young man asked Him, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).

From one perspective, this is an admirable goal, but from another, it’s an incredibly selfish pursuit. This rich young man has so much on earth and now wants to make sure he has eternal life in the next life. Jesus teaches him that eternal life is not a self-centered pursuit but one where “whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it” (Mark 8:35). The rich young man was so bent on saving his eternal life that he risked losing it. That is why Jesus recommends that he sell all he has and give it to the poor (Mark 8:21). Jesus doesn’t tell him to sell it and throw it into a river; he wants this rich young man to spend his life focused on blessing the lives of others besides himself.

This perspective does not explain why we suffer, but it does acknowledge that if we are going to participate in God’s work and glory, then we roll up our sleeves and help those who do suffer.

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