

Job 20-23 What Kind of Universe Is This

1. Starting today, we begin changing the pace a bit in our walk through Job. Rather like Ecclesiastes, if you are here to study this particular problem and all its nuances, Job can get repetitive. This is not unusual; these books were written for a purpose and during a season. If you are not struggling with this issue at present and you are in a different season, then going through Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Leviticus....a whole LOT of scripture can seem repetitive and boring.
2. It isn't boring if you ARE in the right season at the right time...but that isn't everybody. So, the plan is to move through this book and change as it changes. The speeches will change soon. A new player will suddenly show up and, right after that, God breaks into the discussion and that changes everything.
3. NOTE: It does NOT make everything better; it changes everything. When we get to that section, there are some hidden treasures that most people never find...but we will, Lord willing.
4. Now...what kind of universe is this? What is your worldview? When you describe right and wrong (we ate from the wrong tree!) and the way of the universe, do you use a lot of words like "should", "ought", "must" or "designed to"? Or do you just describe what actually is and what actually happens? Weird question? Not at all.
5. Zophar speaks in chapter 20 of a moral universe. He believes that, since the beginning, the universe was designed to make sure that the wicked are punished and that good people prosper. How's that Fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil tasting, there, Zophar? Yummy?
6. Zophar says in 20:2,3 that he has to answer because he has been personally offended by Job. Imagine being the kind of person who is offended by someone else's pain. Then he speaks of a universe that makes sense and has an orderly progression, designed to punish the wicked and bless the righteous. **Job 20:4-10**. "Hey, Job, it will all work out in the end."

7. According to Zophar's view of the universe, wicked people never prosper for long. They will have to hand back all of their stuff and God won't let them enjoy what they eat or where they live. Zophar gets very graphic here and I've chosen not to read a lot of what he has to say because it is just gory, icky, and wrong.
8. In the universe Zophar posits, God will take vengeance – here, now – on those who have gained their position by greed (note as you read this that Zophar is not just saying Job lives in that universe...but that he is part of the evil in the universe!) **Job 20:22-25**. You see, Zophar? This is why we can't read your whole speech.
9. Job has an entirely different view of the universe. It might be that, once upon a time, he would have agreed with Zophar but no longer. Job has given up on winning over his friends. They are a lost cause (**Job 21:2,3**). He goes on to say that he isn't talking to them anymore but to God because he has some serious issues with the way God is running the universe.
10. Job challenges Zophar's fluffy bunny world (**Job 21:7-9, 13-14**). This is observational...and I have no doubt that Job could have supplied many examples of evil flourishing that his friends would have known well. They were living in denial, Job wasn't. Job already impresses me by not being afraid to SEE. Now, he even asks for a measurement (in science, we devise ways to measure and quantify everything from feelings to nitrogen. We call those measuring tools "instruments").
11. Zophar and friends, bring your protractors over here. (**Job 21:17,18**) Job would like some real numbers (just like we want them during this crisis. What data is collected, which data you choose to bring, and how you choose to apply it makes all the difference)
12. (Imogene and the marriage seminar – we cannot assume that our life has been easy and blessed because we are strong and good) Job informs them that this universe appears random and unreliable (**Job 21:23-26**). A tad gross, but absolutely accurate. So how can we measure God, measure our universe, and, thereby, measure each other. Job would warn them – we can't! We don't know the rule book God is using (**Job 21:22**).

13. Eliphaz leaps in here and says some truly awful things. First, in 22:2-3, he speaks as if God is so far above us there is no way our prayers, acts of kindness, and righteousness would ever be of benefit to God. Then he goes on a long, extended attack on Job's behavior. Remember Job 1? God says in the council room that Job is a great man who is righteous and good. Eliphaz has a different, bizarre take. Just a clip here: 22:5-9. Wow. Where did that come from?
14. Simple...it came from Job expressing unorthodox views. That meant he was a danger to the cohesiveness of the community. That makes him devil and he must be marginalized and then destroyed. Then, Eliphaz ends by, once again, begging Job to just repent and everything will be great.
15. Job begins to speak and, for the next several chapters, he spends time contemplating who he is and who God is. Only one short interruption appears and then Job will go on until chapter 30 when a drive by counselor shows up and blasts Job. We will end today with the words of Job 23:8,9,13-17.
16. You will excuse me if my heart leaps when I hear Job say "I am not silenced." THAT is the speak of God in his heart. THAT is the part of Job that is made in the image of God. He isn't going to roll over and die. He is going to stand there and work this out. It reminds me of Jacob wrestling God and saying "I will not let you go until you bless me."
17. Mystery, surprise, disappointment, joy...they are all here in this universe. But God is here, too. And He has come down to us to reassure us that He watches, He knows, and He will save us.