

## Job – When the Narrative Breaks Down

1. We are about to hit a bunch of rocks on our way through this book. Up until this point, there has been a very predictable pattern to the exchange of speeches. It is like a tennis match but with three different opponents taking their turn to lob a speech in at Job that he, then, lobs back. And then we hit chapters 24-31.
2. Job was already speaking last week and we left him in the middle of a response. Today, we will look at that response and at a very surprising, short response from Bildad and then set up the rest of the chapters for your private study and devotion.
3. If you remember from last week, Eliphaz believes that the universe is moral and predictable. Job shot back examples of how random and how immoral the universe actually is. This section is a very good warning to anyone who doesn't bring their theology all the way down into the homes and streets of real human beings. If we don't, we come off as poor counselors, irrelevant, easily dismissed (the split in 1034 due to arguments about whether the Spirit came from the Father only or the Father and the Son. Can you think of anything that was less useful to the lives of people in 1034?).
4. A few years ago, the big movie was Wonder Woman. I usually avoid comic book movies but I went to this one and was impressed by the theological questions it posed and then answered...and they answered them in a way that would of pleased Job. The hero walked around the fields of World War One and asked why this was allowed, why people didn't stop this sort of thing from happening. The unspoken question was: why does God allow this? We've all asked that same question. The hero then leaps in to fight evil directly, at that moment, on the ground.
5. Job wonders why God doesn't do that. **Job 24:1-49,10,12**. Then...Job changes tone so rapidly that it throws students of this book sideways. In verses 18-25, he almost defends God's delay by saying He will get the bad people one day. He shows no hope of relief and peace for the victims of evil men, though. Some have even suggested that Job was repeating the arguments of his accusers in a sarcastic way... but I don't read it that way.

6. Whatever was going on, Bildad comes back in, but only for a moment. The entire chapter consists of just this: **25:1-6**. I appreciate Bildad wanting to elevate God and give him glory even in the dark, even during the worst of storms. But here is a very important thing to consider: elevating God does not require or warrant a devaluing of a human being. Ever. We used to sing a song “At The Cross” that had a line “would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?”
7. That bothered me as a child. I brought it up to a teacher and pointed to a psalm where David called himself a worm. My response then is my response now: DAVID said that about himself and Bildad said it about all humans but God has never said such a thing about humans and everything God has done for us through the millennia proves He does not consider us worms.
8. So...elevate God AND those made in His image.
9. Chapters 26-31 have given scholars and theologians fits. Here is why: in the earliest manuscripts, who said what was not plainly marked. Tradition and teachings over the years led to the explanatory notes indicating who is speaking. When we get to chapters 26-31, we stumble. There are several theories about what happened here.
  - a. The group broke up and we are seeing chaos in Job’s mind.
  - b. The group has grown and arguments and counters are flying back and forth.
  - c. The group is coming and going and these are the editor’s notes to be formed into speeches later.
10. We know that the original group has gone silent, or they are all speaking past each other so who is saying what is confusing. That said, it is VERY much worth your while to study chapters 26-31 and keep in mind that these are men talking about God, not God talking about men. In other words, what is being said here about men and God and life is from the perspective of men, not God. God is allowing them to share their confusion and pain...and their erroneous assumptions about God!

11. A few high points. In Job 26:7-14, we see science and history. Why was the earth covered in chaos by Genesis 1:2? Lots of theories but no answers. God defeated evil forces – here called the gliding serpent and Rahab – and left faint echoes of His work for us to find, according to this speaker.
12. Chapter 27 sounds like Job is drawing a line in the sand. Job 27:5,6. It may be Job speaking in the rest of the chapter but it sounds like one of his friends. The pictures of how God deals with evil people are amazing and, again, make sure you read these. These chapters will give you words and phrases to help you get through whatever storms you are facing or will face.
13. One such picture is the east wind in Job 27:21-23. Wow. All of chapter 28 sounds like Solomon: a relentless search for wisdom and it all comes down to Job 28:28. The search and the pictures in this book are stunning.
14. Chapters 29 and 30 are a recap of Job's story from his viewpoint. The book started with the story from God's viewpoint. It is very interesting to read Job's take on the history of his pain and remember what we know that he did not and could not. It might give us pause when we are in storms to know that we are earthbound creatures who don't know the whole story.
15. Next week...a new character appears. And he has a lot to say. But before we hear him, remember this: God doesn't consider Job nor his friends worms. God loves them and wants them to get through this. We are earthbound creatures but we are made in the image of God. God does not move at the speed we wish, nor does He come when we call like a pet. He is not there to be at our beck and call and to ensure that we have a lovely day.
16. But He is there. And He is not resting. God is on the move. The challenge to us is keeping that faith alive in the dark.