



**The Book of Job**

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### **Introduction**

When thinking about Job, many people think the book is dealing with the topic of the righteous suffering. However, this view is somewhat nearsighted because Job is never told who was immediately responsible for his suffering or the reason for his suffering. Nevertheless, Job's suffering is a springboard from which we can deal with the issue of the administration of God's justice. This refers to God either blessing a person for living righteously (remunerative justice), or judging a person for living wickedly (retributive justice).

Job lived a righteous life and is pictured as having the blessings of an ideal family, wealth, a good reputation, and social prestige. However, Job's life of blessing quickly changed into one of severe suffering for no apparent reason for which Job could be held accountable (1:8; 2:3). This challenges his understanding of how God administers His justice. Even his friends are want for an explanation. In the end, they all had misguided ideas about how God administers justice.

### **The Misguided Interpretations of God's Administration of Justice**

Satan, Job's friends, and Job have various interpretations of this subject.

#### **1) God's Administration of Justice is Inherently Flawed.**

This is the view of Satan. God asks him in 1:8 if he has found anyone in the earth as upright as Job. Satan responds by questioning God's administration of justice. Satan suggests that if God would remove Job's blessings, Job would curse God (1:9–11). In other words, Job is righteous because God has rewarded him. The implication is that God's system of justice does not promote genuine righteousness. Man serves God for His blessings and not for true devotion to God. Satan then removes most of Job's blessings attempting to get Job to curse God. By doing this, Satan will demonstrate that God's moral order has an intrinsic defect.

## **2) God's Administration of Justice is Mechanically Applied**

Job's three friends and Elihu share a common belief that God mechanically rewards and judges people for their actions. This is an immediate cause-effect kind of understanding of God's justice. They demonstrated this by accepting the corollary of retributive and remunerative justice.

This is the corollary: if a person is suffering, he had to be living in sin; similarly, if a person is prospering, he had to be living righteously. In each case the degree of suffering or prospering was directly proportional to the person's behavior. Prior to his suffering, Job's friends viewed him as living proof of remunerative justice. However, after his disasters they viewed him as living in extreme sin, but not so serious as to have his life taken. Each of Job's friends had a different take on this.

*Eliphaz* assumes Job's sin is minor and that he is basically innocent. He recognizes Job as a blameless man who is suffering (4:3–6). This is a problem for his theology. His solution ... even one as righteous as Job will suffer deservedly at times (4:17–19). He also assumed Job's suffering was not as bad as it could be and could be quickly removed (4:7). He also suspects that God uses suffering for correction purposes (5:17–27).

*Bildad* is convinced that God appropriately administered justice to Job and his family. He viewed Job as sinful and deservedly suffering, but not to the point that God would immediately take his life, as He did with Job's children (8:2–4).

*Zophar* is convinced that Job is a hypocritical sinner, concealing his sin. Job claimed he was clean in God's sight (11:4). But Zophar thought that God's retributive theology was not tit-for-tat, since God has mercifully overlooked a portion of Job's sins. If the truth had been revealed, Job would have been a greater sinner than anyone could have imagined.

*Elihu* also defended God's justice. He assumed that Job was suffering because of sin (33:27; 34:11–12, 31–33, 37; 36:8–10). Even though Eliphaz had postulated that God used suffering for purposes of correction, he more thoroughly develops God's instructional use of suffering (33:19–28; 36:8–12). For Elihu, suffering was not only for retribution, but also for correction.

### **3) God's Administration of Justice is Interpreted as Being Capricious.**

Until he has experienced suffering, Job had basically agreed with his friends. But now he changed his mind. Since he was living righteously yet suffering, he is looking for other explanations of God's justice. He initially responded to his calamities by calmly accepting these as God's will for his life. However, after prolonged reflection, he realizes that his understanding of the moral order of life has collapsed.

#### **Job's Wrong Accusations Against God**

While Job made several positive statements about God, he also made several wrong accusations. God accuses Job of speaking out of ignorance (38:2), of making false accusations against Him (40:2), and of discrediting His justice (40:8). Here are a summary of these accusations:

#### *God has Mistreated Job.*

Job accused God of oppressing him while smiling on the plans of the wicked (10:3), attacking him in anger (16:9–12), wronging him and counting him as His enemy (19:6–11), denying him justice (27:1–2), and ruthlessly mistreating him (30:19–21).

#### *God was Not Taking Care of Other Suffering People.*

Job was essentially saying that God was not doing His job as ruler since He allowed the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the needy to be oppressed by the wicked (24:1–12).

By accusing God in this manner, even though done in ignorance; and desiring to enter into litigation with God, Job was in effect passing judgment on God. Job was pridefully making himself out to be God's equal. In effect, Job was maintaining that God capriciously (unpredictably, impulsively) administered justice. God responds by showing there is only One who is able to speak *ex cathedra* (by virtue of His sovereign authority) on the administration of justice.

#### **The Divine Interpretation of God's Administration of Justice**

Rather than responding to Job's demand for a legal hearing, God appears in a storm. Rather than discussing Job's innocence or how He administers justice, God overwhelms Job with questions about His creation and management of the world. In both speeches, God challenges Job's man-centered view of the moral order of life and substantiates a God-centered perspective.

## **1) The LORD's Control of the Universe is Beyond Anyone's Comprehension (38:2–40:2).**

The LORD begins this speech by accusing Job of darkening His counsel by words spoken in ignorance (38:2). He similarly concludes this speech with the same accusation, by questioning Job concerning the validity of his desire to legally contend with God (40:2). In each accusation, God is reflecting the fact that Job does not comprehend His plan and work.

God demonstrates Job's lack of wisdom by raising three rhetorical questions: (1) God's creation of the world (38:4–11); (2) His sustenance of the world (38:12–38); and (3) His management of the animal kingdom, most of which is undomesticated (38:39–39:30). The point is that Job cannot understand what God is doing because he is not God's equal. This is a God-centered world which stands in contrast to the man-centered world and man-centered life views advocated by Job and his fellow wise men.

## **2) The LORD's Administration of Justice is Beyond Anyone's Comprehension (40:7–41:34).**

God accuses Job again of having discredited His justice, by condemning God in order to justify himself (40:8). After this God challenges Job to take over God's place and execute retributive justice over the wicked (40:9–14). He also speaks of two of the wildest animals of Job's day, behemoth and leviathan. God uses both creatures as an analogy to demonstrate that His administration of justice is beyond Job's comprehension. The point is that if Job cannot capture or control either behemoth or leviathan, then how could he hope to take God's place in administering justice? This was impossible since God's control of the moral order of this life was beyond Job's creaturely comprehension. Likewise the Lord's administration of justice is beyond any created being's understanding. Job doesn't have issue of justice explained, but he does learn that he must submit to the Sovereign God who administers justice in perfect conformity with His good nature and plan.

### **A Summary of the Message of Job**

*Because of God's incomprehensible wisdom and incomparable power as reflected by His creating and sustaining the world and its inhabitants, He is its Sovereign who freely administers justice correctly. Because this is a God-centered world, man must fearfully submit to the LORD and His sovereign will.*

~AWB