A FREE STUDY RESOURCE

For Nothing

A Study of the Book of Job

By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*

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A Word Before We Begin

Sooner or later everyone asks the question the book of Job asks. Usually it is not asked in a classroom. It is asked in a hospital hallway, at a graveside, or at three in the morning: *Why this? Why me? Why them?* The book of Job does not answer that question the way we want it answered. It does something better and harder. It shows us what God does with a sufferer who will not let go of him.

Most people know Job by a single phrase: "the patience of Job." That phrase is not wrong; James commends Job's endurance (James 5:11). But anyone who reads past the second chapter finds a man who is anything but placid. Job curses the day he was born. He accuses God of treating him as an enemy. He demands a hearing. He argues, chapter after chapter, with friends who came to comfort him and stayed to prosecute him. And at the end the Lord says to Eliphaz, "you have not spoken about Me accurately, as My servant Job has" (42:7). Whatever the patience of Job is, it is not silence.

Why “For Nothing”

The title comes from the question that sets the whole book in motion. When the Lord points to his servant Job, the Accuser answers, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (1:9). The charge is that Job’s faith is a transaction: God pays in blessings, and Job pays back in piety. Stop the payments and the piety will stop too.

One chapter later the Lord uses the same Hebrew word to describe what has happened to Job. The Accuser stirred him up to destroy Job “without reason” (2:3), or, to translate the word the same way both times, *for nothing*. The Accuser says Job’s faith is not for nothing. The Lord says Job’s suffering is.

That small word, *ḥinnām*, carries the whole book. It also points past the book. The New Testament’s word for “freely” or “as a gift” is the word the ancient Greek translators used for *ḥinnām* in Job 1:9, and it is the word Paul uses when he says we are justified freely by God’s grace (Romans 3:24). The answer to the Accuser’s question is not finally that Job loved God for nothing. It is that God loves for nothing. This study follows Job from the ash heap to the place where he can say, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (19:25), and that is where it ends.

How This Study Works

There are ten sessions. Each one assigns a reading from Job and then works through the parts of it that matter most. Job is long, forty-two chapters, and most of it is poetry. You do not need to read every line aloud in class. You should read the assigned chapters beforehand if you can, because the book’s argument builds, and the friends sound more reasonable than they are until you hear them in full.

The first two sessions cover the prologue (chapters 1 and 2) and Job’s opening lament (chapter 3). Sessions 3 through 5 take the three friends one at a time, following each through all his speeches rather than reading the dialogue cycle by cycle. Session 6 gathers Job’s longing for someone to stand between him and God. Sessions 7 through 9 cover the poem on wisdom, the speeches of Elihu, and the Lord’s answer from the whirlwind. Session 10, “My Redeemer Lives,” brings together Job’s great confession in chapter 19 and the book’s ending in chapter 42.

Each session closes the same way: a section on where people commonly go wrong with the passage, a section on why it matters, suggestions for going deeper, and questions for discussion.

A Handful of Hebrew Words

Along the way we will slow down over seven Hebrew words. You do not need to know any Hebrew. Each word is given in transliteration, explained in plain English, and connected to the passages where it matters. Each also has a fuller entry on the website, noted in the footnotes, where you can read more about it.[1]

A word of caution comes with this. The Hebrew of Job is among the most difficult in the Old Testament. It has more words that appear nowhere else in Scripture than almost any other book, and translators disagree with each other more often here than in most places. When a passage is genuinely uncertain, this study will say so. That is not a weakness in Scripture. It is honesty about our knowledge of an ancient language, and it is a reason to read the NET's translator notes, which are unusually thorough on Job.[2]

A Word to Those Who Teach

Someone in your room will be suffering when you teach this. Probably several people. Some will have buried children, as Job did. Some will be sick with no cure in sight. Some will have been hurt by Christians who spoke to them the way Job's friends spoke to him.

Teach with that in mind. The great danger in a class on Job is that the class turns into Job's friends: a group of well-fed people explaining suffering to each other from a safe distance. Let the book's own verdict govern the room. The friends spoke many true sentences and still did not speak rightly about God (42:7). If someone in your class is in crisis, the right response is not a better explanation. It is your pastor, and the Word and Sacraments he has been called to give.

1. Each entry has its own page under larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/, and the footnote where a word first appears gives its full address. Each includes the word's range of meaning, where it appears in Scripture, and what confessional Lutherans hear in it.
2. On how the Old Testament text was copied and handed down, and how to think about places where it is uncertain, see *Ad Fontes: The Old Testament Text*.

Session 1: For Nothing (Job 1-2)

The book of Job begins with two scenes running at once. On earth, a good man loses everything in a single afternoon. In heaven, a conversation takes place that explains, at least in part, why. The reader is allowed to hear both. As far as the book tells us, Job hears only the first.

That arrangement is the key to the whole book. From chapter 3 to chapter 37, Job and his friends argue about why Job is suffering, and none of them knows what we know. We have watched the heavenly court. They have only the ash heap. Everything they say, they say in the dark, and the book wants us to feel how much that changes things.

The Man from Uz (1:1-5)

The story opens like a folk tale: "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job" (1:1). Uz lay somewhere east of Israel, probably in the region of Edom (Lamentations 4:21). Job is not an Israelite. There is no mention of Abraham, Moses, the covenant, or the temple. That is part of the book's reach. Its question is not an Israelite question. It belongs to everyone who has ever suffered under the sky.

The opening verses tell us three things about him. He is "pure and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). He is enormously wealthy, "the greatest man of all the people of the East" (1:3). And he is a father of ten, who worries about his children's hearts:

> And when the days of feasting were over, Job would send for his children to purify them, rising early in the morning to offer burnt offerings for all of them. For Job thought, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular practice. (1:5, BSB)

tām: pure, whole, blameless

The word the NET translates "pure" is *tām*. Other translations say "blameless." It means whole, complete, all of a piece. The Lord himself repeats it twice (1:8; 2:3), so there is no question that the description is true.[3]

But notice what the blameless man does. He gets up early and offers sacrifices for sin. *Tām* does not mean sinless. It means a man whose whole life is turned toward God, and a life

turned toward God includes the altar. Before other people, Job is upright in every way a man can be. Before God, he lives by sacrifice. Keep that in mind, because the book will end the same way it begins: with burnt offerings and a man praying for others (42:8).

ḥinnām: "Is It for Nothing?" (1:6–12)

The scene shifts to heaven. The sons of God present themselves before the Lord, and Satan comes with them. The Lord asks where he has been, and then asks a question of his own:

> Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one on earth like him, a man who is blameless and upright, who fears God and shuns evil." (1:8, BSB)

It is the Lord who raises Job's name. That is uncomfortable, and we should not rush past it. But listen to Satan's answer, because it is the question the rest of the book exists to answer:

> Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not placed a hedge on every side around him and his household and all that he owns? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out Your hand and strike all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face." (1:9-11, BSB)

The word for "for nothing" is *ḥinnām*. It means without payment, without cause, gratis. It is built on the Hebrew word for grace, *ḥēn*, so the word for "free of charge" is itself formed from the word for favor.[4]

Satan's charge is that Job's religion is a business arrangement. God pays well, so Job worships well. Remove the hedge and you will see what Job really thinks of God.

It is a devastating question, and not only about Job. Does anyone love God for nothing? Or is every prayer we pray, deep down, a kind of invoice?

haśśāṭān: the Accuser (1:6–12)

The name "Satan" in Job 1 and 2 carries the definite article in Hebrew: *haśśāṭān*, "the adversary" or "the Accuser." The word is used elsewhere for any opponent, including a pro-

3. See the Hebrew word entry for *tām* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/tam/.
4. See the Hebrew word entry for *ḥinnām* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/hinnam/.

secutor in a courtroom (Psalm 109:6). Here it works almost as a job title. His business in the heavenly court is accusation.[5]

Two things about him matter for everything that follows. First, he has to ask permission, and the Lord sets the limits: "Everything he has is in your hands, but you must not lay a hand on the man himself!" (1:12). This is not a contest between equals. Second, after chapter 2 he disappears from the book entirely. He is not in the dialogues, not in the whirlwind, not in the ending. The Accuser does not get the last word. He does not get any word at all.

"The Lord Gives, and the Lord Takes Away" (1:13–22)

Then comes the afternoon. Four messengers arrive, each one still speaking when the next one comes in. Raiders take the oxen and donkeys. Fire from heaven burns the sheep. Chaldeans take the camels. And a wind strikes the house where Job's sons and daughters are eating together, and it falls on them, "and they died!" (1:19). Each messenger ends the same way: he alone has escaped to tell Job what happened.

Job's response is one of the most remarkable things in Scripture:

> Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, saying: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing. (1:20-22, BSB)

Notice first that Job grieves. He tears his robe and shaves his head, the ancient signs of mourning. Faith does not require a man to pretend he has not been wounded. The Hebrew verb behind "fell to the ground" is the ordinary word for worship. Job falls down in grief and in worship at the same time.

Notice second what Job does not say. He does not say, "Satan has taken away." He could not have known about the heavenly court, but even so, his confession is striking: he places everything, the giving and the taking, under the hand of the Lord. And the narrator immediately confirms that this was not sin. Job is not wrong to see God's hand in his loss.

Most of all, notice the posture. Job does not answer the Accuser by proving the quality of his love. He answers by receiving. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return." He came into the world with empty hands, and he will leave with empty

5. See the Hebrew word entry for *haśśāṭān* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/ha-satan/.

hands, and everything in between was gift. That is not the voice of a man running a business. It is the voice of faith.

"Skin for Skin!" (2:1–10)

The heavenly court meets again. The Lord repeats his description of Job and adds a sentence that should stop us:

> Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one on earth like him, a man who is blameless and upright, who fears God and shuns evil. He still retains his integrity, even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." (2:3, BSB)

"Without reason" is *ḥinnām* again, the same word Satan used in 1:9. The NET translates it differently in the two places, which is good English but hides the echo. In Hebrew, the Accuser said Job's faith was not *for nothing*. The Lord says Job's suffering was.

That sentence closes off, in advance, the explanation Job's friends will spend the rest of the book defending. Job did not suffer because of hidden sin. The Lord himself says so. Whatever else is happening, it is not punishment.

Satan tries again: "Skin for skin! … A man will give up all he owns in exchange for his life!" (2:4). Touch his body, and he will curse you. The Lord permits it, with a new limit: "only preserve his life" (2:6). Job is struck with sores from head to foot and ends up sitting among the ashes, scraping himself with a piece of broken pottery (2:7-8).

Then his wife speaks: "Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die!" (2:9).[6]

Job's wife has been treated harshly by preachers for centuries. Before we join them, we should remember that the ten children in that fallen house were hers too. She is not a villain. She is a woman in unbearable grief who has concluded that faith is no longer worth holding. Job's answer is firm but not cruel:

> "You speak as a foolish woman speaks," he told her. "Should we accept from God only good and not adversity?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (2:10, BSB)[7]

6. The Hebrew text here, as in 1:5, 1:11, and 2:5, actually reads "bless God." The context makes clear that the sense is "curse," and translations rightly render it that way. The scribes apparently could not bring themselves to write "curse God" and wrote "bless" in its place, a reverent habit that also appears in 1 Kings 21:10 and 13.

The word she used, "integrity," is *tummâ*, the noun form of *tām*. She treats integrity as something Job is clinging to, a thing he possesses. But what Job is actually clinging to is God.

Seven Days in the Dirt (2:11-13)

The prologue ends with the arrival of three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They come "go and sympathize with Job and comfort him" (2:11). When they see him from a distance they do not even recognize him. They weep aloud, tear their robes, throw dust in the air, and then do something wise:

> Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights, but no one spoke a word to him because they saw how intense his suffering was. (2:13, BSB)

This is the best thing Job's friends ever do. For a week they simply sit in the dirt with him. Their failure begins, as we will see, when they open their mouths.

Where people get it wrong

"God made a bet with the devil." The prologue is often summarized as a wager, with Job as the stakes. That reading makes God either uncertain of the outcome or indifferent to the man. The text supports neither. The Lord is not wondering how things will turn out; he is the one who names Job's faithfulness before the Accuser does. What is on trial is not God's knowledge. It is the Accuser's claim that faith is only ever a transaction. We should admit honestly that the prologue raises hard questions the book never fully answers. But it does not present a gambling God.

"Job must have done something." This is the friends' theology, and the prologue refutes it before they arrive. The Lord calls Job *tām* three times and says he was ruined *ḥinnām*, without reason. Any reading of Job that ends with the sufferer secretly deserving it has not read the first two chapters. The Lutheran Confessions draw the same line: the troubles of believers are not always punishments for particular sins, and Christ has already borne the punishment for them (Apology XII).

"Faithful people get blessed." The prosperity gospel is Satan's question turned into a program: faith as investment, blessing as return. Its mirror image is just as common, when

7. The word translated "evil" is *raʿ*, which covers calamity and harm as well as wickedness. Job is speaking of what he has suffered, not of sin. Scripture can say that the Lord brings calamity (Isaiah 45:7) and still insist that he is not the author of sin. The Augsburg Confession says it plainly: the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, that is, of the devil and ungodly people (Augsburg Confession XIX).

people assume that someone who loses everything must have lacked faith. Both treat faith and blessing as wages. Job 1 and 2 rule out both.

So what

The prologue tells the reader something the sufferer is not told. The book never says that Job learned what we know; for the whole length of his suffering, he had no explanation. That should make us very careful. We are never in a position to announce the hidden reason for anyone's suffering, including our own. Luther described the theologian of glory as one who calls evil good and good evil, and the theologian of the cross as one who calls a thing what it actually is (Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 21). Job calls his loss what it is: loss. He tears his robe. And he still blesses the name of the Lord.

What we are given is not the explanation but the promise. Job did not have the heavenly scene. We do not have ours either. What we have is a word that God has spoken to us plainly: in Christ, in the absolution, in the water of Baptism, and in his body and blood given and shed for you. When the Accuser asks whether your faith is worth anything once the blessings are gone, do not answer by pointing at your faith. Point at the God who justifies freely, *ḥinnām*, and who gave his Son for nothing we had earned.

If you want to go deeper

Read all of chapters 1 and 2 in one sitting and mark every place the words "pure," "integrity," "for nothing," and "without reason" appear. Then read Ezekiel 14:14 and 20, where Job is named with Noah and Daniel, and James 5:11. For a New Testament scene that echoes the heavenly court, read Luke 22:31-32. The Hebrew word entries for *ḥinnām*, *tām*, and *haśśāṭān* go further into each word.

Questions for discussion

1. Before reading this session, what did you think the book of Job was about? What does the phrase "the patience of Job" usually mean when people use it?
2. Satan asks, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Be honest: in what ways does our own faith sometimes work like a transaction?
3. Job offers sacrifices for his children "in case" they sinned in their hearts (1:5). What does this tell us about what "pure" or "blameless" means?
4. Job says, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away." Is it comforting or troubling to place loss under God's hand? Why does the narrator say this was not sin?

5. How should we think about Job's wife? What would you want to say to someone in her position?
6. The reader knows about the heavenly court, and as far as we are told, Job never does. How should that shape the way we speak to people who are suffering?

Session 2: The Day Job Cursed (Job 3)

Chapter 2 ends with seven days of silence. Chapter 3 ends it. And what comes out of Job's mouth is not what the prologue has prepared us for. The man who said, "Blessed be the name of the LORD" now curses the day he was born.

Many readers find chapter 3 shocking, and some find it embarrassing. It seems to undo everything the prologue established. But the book does not treat it as a fall from faith. The narrator who twice said, "In all this Job did not sin," is not correcting himself. Chapter 3 is what faith sounds like after a week in the ashes. It is lament, and lament is one of the ways God's people pray.

"Let the Day Perish" (3:1–10)

Job opens with a curse on his own birthday:

> "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is conceived.' (3:3, BSB)

What follows is poetry of undoing. Job wants that day covered in darkness, erased from the calendar, never counted among the days of the year (3:4-6). The most striking line is short. Of his birthday Job says, "let it be darkness" (3:4). In Hebrew those words mirror the first words God spoke over creation: "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). God said, *let there be light*. Job says, *let there be darkness*. He is asking for his small piece of the world to be uncreated.

He calls on "those who are prepared to rouse Leviathan" (3:8), the chaos monster of ancient imagination, to curse the day with him. Remember that name. Leviathan returns at the end of the book, and when he does, the Lord is the one speaking of him.[8]

"Why Did I Not Die at Birth?" (3:11–19)

The second movement turns from cursing to asking. Why did he not die as he came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive him and breasts to nurse him (3:11-12)? If he had died, he says, he would now be at rest, lying quietly with kings and counselors and princes, in a place where "the wicked cease from raging, and there the weary find rest" (3:17), where "the slave is free from his master" (3:19).

Job's picture of death here is a place of quiet and nothing more. That is not the fullness of what Scripture teaches about death and what lies beyond it, and Job himself will reach

much further before the book is done (19:25-27). But in this moment, rest is all he can imagine wanting.

"Hedged In" (3:20–26)

The third movement widens from Job's own birth to everyone who suffers:

> Why is light given to the miserable, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death that does not come, and search for it like hidden treasure, (3:20-21, BSB)

And then, of himself:

> Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? (3:23, BSB)

Here is an irony only the reader can see. In chapter 1, the Accuser complained that God had made "a hedge around him" (1:10). That hedge was protection. Now Job uses a closely related Hebrew word for his experience of God: God has *hedged him in*.[9] What looked from heaven like a wall of blessing feels, from the ash heap, like a prison. The same God, the same hand, and the sufferer cannot tell the difference.

The chapter ends without resolution: "For the thing I feared has overtaken me, and what I dreaded has befallen me. I am not at ease or quiet; I have no rest, for trouble has come" (3:25-26). The man who rose early to offer sacrifices "in case" his children had sinned (1:5) was a man who lived with fear. Now the thing he feared has come.

Lament Is Prayer

Job 3 does not stand alone in Scripture. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth in almost the same words (Jeremiah 20:14-18). Psalm 88 is a prayer that never finds its way to relief; its last word in Hebrew is "darkness." These are not stray moments of weakness that slipped past the editors. They are part of the prayer book God gave his people.

What makes lament different from despair is its direction. Despair turns away from God and goes silent. Lament stays in God's presence and complains to his face. In chapter 3 Job speaks mostly *about* God. By chapter 7 he will be speaking directly *to* him (7:7-21), and he will not stop until God answers. A man who argues with God has not let go of him.

8. See Job 41, and Session 9 of this study.
9. The two Hebrew words are not identical, but they are close in sound and meaning, and many interpreters have heard the echo.

And lament has been prayed by the Son of God himself. On the cross, Jesus did not recite a cheerful verse. He prayed the first line of a psalm of lament: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46, quoting Psalm 22:1). Hebrews says that in the days of his flesh he offered up prayers with loud cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7). When you lament, you are not praying beneath him. You are praying with him.

A pastoral word

Job 3 speaks about longing for death, and some people who read this study will know that longing from the inside. If that is you, notice what Job does with it. He does not act on it. He speaks it, out loud, in the presence of God and in the presence of people. Do the same. Tell your pastor. Tell someone you trust. If you are in danger of harming yourself, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the United States, or go to the nearest emergency room. The book of Job does not end at chapter 3, and neither does your story.

Where people get it wrong

"Christians shouldn't talk like that." Some believe that faith means always speaking positively and that complaint is a failure of trust. Scripture disagrees. It includes Job 3, Jeremiah 20, Psalm 88, and the cry of Jesus from the cross. What God forbids is not honest complaint brought to him. It is turning away from him. At the end of the book, God rebukes Job's friends for how they spoke about him, not Job for lamenting (42:7).

"Job 3 teaches us what death is." The opposite mistake is to lift Job's words out of their setting and treat them as doctrine, for example, to conclude from 3:13-19 that death is simply quiet nonexistence. Scripture faithfully records what Job said in his anguish. That does not make every sentence of his lament a teaching about the afterlife. Job 3 must be read alongside Job 19 and alongside the resurrection of Christ.

"Lament is venting." Modern people sometimes treat lament as emotional release, like shouting into a pillow. Biblical lament is addressed. It goes somewhere. It is spoken to God, or at least in his hearing, because the one lamenting still believes God is the one who can answer.

So what

The church should be a place where Job 3 can be said out loud. If the only prayers our people ever hear are prayers of thanks and praise, they will conclude that their darker prayers do not belong in church. The Psalms teach otherwise. So does the cross.

And if you are the one sitting in the ashes, you are allowed to bring God your worst sentences. He is not fragile. He can bear your complaint. What he calls you back from is a different kind of silence: the silence of despair, which turns away from him. The God who hedged Job in is the same God who, at the end of the book, answers him.

If you want to go deeper

Read Job 3 alongside Jeremiah 20:7-18 and Psalm 88. Then read Job 7, where Job turns his lament directly to God and even parodies Psalm 8 ("What is man?") in his pain (7:17-18). Finally, read Psalm 22 all the way through, noticing where it begins and where it ends.

Questions for discussion

1. How did you react to the change between chapter 2 and chapter 3? Why might the book place these two responses side by side?
2. Job asks for his birthday to become darkness, reversing "Let there be light." What does that tell us about how deep his suffering goes?
3. The Accuser saw a "hedge" of protection; Job feels "hedged in." Have you ever experienced God's care as confinement? What might this teach us about how suffering distorts what we see?
4. Why do you think Psalm 88, a prayer with no happy ending, is in the Bible?
5. What is the difference between lament and despair? Where does Job fall?
6. How could your congregation make more room for lament in its worship and in its life together?

Session 3: Miserable Comforters (Job 4–7; 15; 22)

For seven days Job's friends said nothing, and that was the best comfort they ever gave. In chapter 4 the first of them speaks. Eliphaz the Temanite is probably the eldest, and he is certainly the most gracious. He begins gently. He reminds Job of all the people Job has helped. He means well.

And he is wrong. Not about everything; much of what Eliphaz says is true, and the apostle Paul will one day quote him. He is wrong about Job, and wrong about what a suffering man needs. The next three sessions take the friends one at a time, following each through all his speeches. We start with Eliphaz because he sets the pattern the others follow.

"Who, Being Innocent, Ever Perished?" (4:1–11)

Eliphaz opens with tact: "If one ventures a word with you, will you be wearied? Yet who can keep from speaking?" (4:2). He praises Job for having strengthened others (4:3-4). Then he offers what he believes is comfort:

> Is your reverence not your confidence, and the uprightness of your ways your hope? Consider now, I plead: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Or where have the upright been destroyed? (4:6-7, BSB)

Listen to what he is saying. *If you are really innocent, Job, you have nothing to worry about. The innocent never perish.* The word behind "blameless ways" is from the same family as *tām*, the word God used for Job in chapter 1.[10] Eliphaz agrees that Job has been blameless. And he tells Job to put his hope in that.

That is the law offered as comfort. Your piety is your confidence; your record is your hope. It sounds encouraging, and it is a trap. Because if the innocent never perish, and Job is perishing, then there is only one conclusion left to draw. Eliphaz does not draw it yet. He will.

"A Word Was Secretly Brought to Me" (4:12–21)

Then Eliphaz claims a special source for his wisdom:

10. The phrase is *tōm dĕrākêkā*, "the integrity of your ways." On *tām* and its family, see the Hebrew word entry at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/tam/.

> Now a word came to me secretly; my ears caught a whisper of it. In disquieting visions in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, (4:12-13, BSB)

Trembling and terror seize him until his bones shake (4:14).

A spirit glides past his face. He cannot make out its form. He hears a murmuring voice, and the voice asks, "Can a mortal be more righteous than God, or a man more pure than his Maker?" (4:17).

Two things are true at once here. The message itself is true. No mortal is righteous before God on his own account; Paul will say the same (Romans 3:10). But the source is a whisper in the night, a shape he cannot recognize, a terror that makes his hair stand up. Eliphaz's authority rests on a private experience no one else can test.

Lutherans have a name for this. The Smalcald Articles warn against the "enthusiasts" who claim the Spirit apart from the external Word, and insist that God deals with us only through his spoken Word and the Sacraments (Smalcald Articles III, 8). Eliphaz is an early enthusiast. His theology comes from a night vision, and he uses it to tell a grieving man what God thinks of him. The book will later show us what it looks like when God actually speaks, out of the whirlwind, in words everyone can hear (38:1).

True Sentences, Wrong Man (5:8–27)

Much of chapter 5 is true, and some of it is beautiful. God "does great and unsearchable things, wonders without number" (5:9). He "sets the lowly on high" (5:11). "He catches the wise in their craftiness" (5:13), a line Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 3:19. And this:

> Blessed indeed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For He wounds, but He also binds; He strikes, but His hands also heal. (5:17-18, BSB)

Proverbs says something very similar (Proverbs 3:11-12), and Hebrews builds on that proverb (Hebrews 12:5-6). There is nothing false in the sentence. The problem is who it is being said to, and why. Eliphaz assumes Job is being disciplined for something, and he promises that if Job will accept it, everything will be restored: security, prosperity, and then this:

> You will know that your offspring will be many, your descendants like the grass of the earth. (5:25, BSB)

He says this to a man whose ten children are lying under the rubble of a fallen house.

Eliphaz closes with a line that sums up his whole method: “Indeed, we have investigated, and it is true! So hear it and know for yourself” (5:27). He has done his research. He has a system. What he does not have is the one thing a comforter needs, which is the ability to see the man in front of him.

C. F. W. Walther spent a career teaching pastors to distinguish law and gospel. One of his theses says that the Word of God is not rightly divided when the law is preached to those who are already in terror because of their sins.[11] Eliphaz does exactly that. He is not a heretic. He is a man who knows many true things and does not know what time it is.

nāḥam: comfort that curdles

The friends came “go and sympathize with Job and comfort him” (2:11). The word for “console” is *nāḥam*, which means to comfort, and in another form, to be sorry or to relent.[12] Comfort is what they came to give. By chapter 16 Job will have a verdict on how they did: “What miserable comforters are you all!” (16:2). The word “comforters” is *nāḥam* again.

Job’s first reply to Eliphaz already tells us where the comfort went wrong. His grief is heavier than the sand of the sea, he says, “that is why my words have been wild” (6:3). He wishes God would simply crush him: “Then I would yet have my comfort” (6:10). The only comfort he can imagine now is the end. And then he says what he needed from his friends:

> A despairing man should have the kindness of his friend, even if he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. (6:14, BSB)

Even if. Even if Job had lost his faith altogether, the friend’s job would be kindness. Job compares his friends to seasonal streams in the desert (6:15-20): caravans come looking for water, counting on it, and find the riverbed dry. “For now you are of no help; you see terror, and you are afraid” (6:21). That is a sharp insight. The friends are afraid. If what happened to Job could happen to a righteous man for no reason, it could happen to them. Their theology is partly a wall they are building for their own protection.

11. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia, 1929), Thesis VIII. The thesis continues: “or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins.” Eliphaz’s error is the first half.
12. See the Hebrew word entry for *nāḥam* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/naham/.

Job's last complaint in chapter 6 names the friends' method exactly: "Do you intend to criticize mere words, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?" (6:26). They are grading his sentences. He needs them to hear the man.

The Theory Hardens (15; 22)

Eliphaz speaks twice more, and each time he is less gentle. In chapter 15 he accuses Job of undermining the fear of God and returns to his night-vision theme: if the heavens themselves are not pure in God's sight, how much less a man (15:14-16).

By chapter 22 the mask is off. Eliphaz has a theory: the innocent do not perish. He has a fact: Job is perishing. Something has to give, and it is Job. So Eliphaz asks whether Job's wickedness is not great, and then he supplies a list of sins that Job never committed: taking pledges from his brothers *ḥinnām*, for no reason; stripping the poor of their clothing; refusing water to the thirsty and bread to the hungry; sending widows away empty (22:5-9). None of it is true. Job will later describe a life of exactly the opposite (29:12-17; 31:16-22). But Eliphaz needs it to be true, so he invents it.

That is where the friends' theology always ends. When a system says suffering must be deserved, and the sufferer did not deserve it, the system will manufacture the guilt it requires.

Where people get it wrong

"Everything happens for a reason." Said to a grieving person, this is usually Eliphaz in a greeting card. God does govern all things, and nothing escapes his hand. But the friends' mistake was not believing in God's providence. It was believing they could read it, and then telling Job what his suffering meant.

"If it's in the Bible, it's God's teaching." Every word of Job is Scripture, and Scripture records the friends' speeches accurately. That does not mean every sentence the friends speak is endorsed. God himself says they did not speak rightly about him (42:7). The book teaches by showing us how true sentences can be used falsely. Paul can quote Eliphaz because the sentence he quotes is true; the book can condemn Eliphaz because of what he did with it.

"God spoke to me." Eliphaz's night vision is the ancestor of every "the Lord laid it on my heart" that is used to tell other people what God thinks of them. God does speak, and he has told us where: in his Word, publicly proclaimed, and in the Sacraments. A whisper in the night that cannot be tested against Scripture carries no authority over anyone's conscience.

So what

It is sobering how much Eliphaz resembles a certain kind of church member, or pastor, or Bible teacher. He is sincere. He knows his Bible. He wants to help. And he makes a suffering man's suffering worse, because he cannot stop explaining it.

The alternative is not to say nothing true. It is to say the right true thing at the right time. For the man in the ashes, that is not the law. He has had all the law he can bear. It is the gospel: the forgiveness of sins, the promise of God's presence, the word that God has not abandoned him. And sometimes, before any word at all, it is seven days of sitting in the dirt.

If you want to go deeper

Read Eliphaz's three speeches straight through (chapters 4-5, 15, and 22) and watch how his tone changes. Then read Job 29 and 31, Job's own account of how he actually lived. For the confessional background on private revelation, read Smalcald Articles III, 8. The Hebrew word entry for *nāḥam* follows the comfort thread through the whole book.

Questions for discussion

1. Eliphaz begins gently and ends by accusing Job of sins he never committed. What drives that change?
2. "Is not your piety your confidence?" Why is this a dangerous thing to say to a suffering believer? Why would "my faith" also be the wrong answer? Where does God point our confidence instead?
3. Paul quotes Eliphaz (1 Corinthians 3:19), and God says Eliphaz did not speak rightly (Job 42:7). How can both be true?
4. Job says his friends are afraid (6:21). How might our own fear shape the way we respond to other people's suffering?
5. Think of a time someone comforted you well, and a time someone comforted you badly. What was the difference?
6. What would it look like for your congregation to "sit in the dirt" with someone who is suffering?

Session 4: The Wisdom of the Fathers (Job 8; 18; 25; 19:1–22)

Bildad the Shuhite is shorter than Eliphaz and harder. Eliphaz appealed to a vision in the night. Bildad appeals to something that sounds far more respectable: the wisdom of the generations. He is not interested in new revelations. He is interested in what everyone has always known.

That makes Bildad the friend confessional Lutherans should watch most closely, because he is the one who sounds most like us. We are a people who love our fathers in the faith, who read old books and sing old hymns and distrust novelty. Bildad shows what happens when tradition is used not to hear God's Word but to sort out a suffering man.

"Does God Pervert Justice?" (8:1–7)

Bildad opens by dismissing everything Job has said: "The words of your mouth are a blustering wind" (8:2). Then he asks the question he believes settles the matter:

> Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against Him, He gave them over to their rebellion. (8:3-4, BSB)

The first sentence is true. God does not pervert justice. The second is the cruelest line any of the friends speaks. Bildad takes the deaths of Job's ten children and turns them into evidence. They must have sinned; God must have handed them over. Remember that Job used to rise early and offer sacrifices for those same children, in case they had sinned in their hearts (1:5). Bildad has taken a father's deepest fear and pronounced it fact.

Then comes the offer. If Job will seek God, "if you are pure and upright, even now He will rouse Himself on your behalf and restore your righteous estate" (8:6). Bildad demands that Job become what the Lord has already said he is.[13] The reader, who heard the Lord call Job "pure and upright" in chapter 1, can see the irony. Bildad cannot.

"Inquire Now of the Former Generation" (8:8–22)

Here is Bildad's method:

13. The Hebrew words behind "pure" in 8:6 and in 1:1 are not the same, though they overlap in meaning. The NET renders both "pure and upright," so the English makes the echo sharper than the Hebrew does. The irony stands either way: Bildad is demanding a purity the Lord has already declared.

> Please inquire of past generations and consider the discoveries of their fathers. For we were born yesterday and know nothing; our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you, and speak from their understanding? (8:8-10, BSB)

There is humility in this. Bildad knows that one lifetime is short and that the generations before us saw things we have not. And the proverbs he offers are sound as far as they go: a papyrus plant cannot grow without a marsh (8:11); the godless man's security is like a spider's web (8:14). But notice what Bildad does with them. The tradition becomes a machine for sorting people. Put a sufferer in one end, and a verdict comes out the other: "Behold, God does not reject the blameless" (8:20). Job has been rejected. Therefore Job is not blameless. The word Bildad uses for "blameless" is *tām*, the Lord's own word for Job.

Lutherans have a precise way of speaking about tradition. The Formula of Concord confesses that Scripture alone is the rule and norm by which all teachers and teachings are judged, and that other writings, however venerable, are witnesses to how the truth was received, not judges over it (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm). Bildad has made the fathers the judge. Worse, he has made them the judge not of a doctrine but of a man.

The Lamp of the Wicked (18)

Bildad's second speech is a portrait of the wicked man's fate. His lamp goes out (18:5-6). Terrors hunt him. His strength is eaten away. And at the end, the memory of him perishes from the earth, and he has no offspring or descendants left among his people (18:17-19).

Bildad never names Job. He does not need to. Every feature of the portrait matches Job's losses, down to the missing children. It is an accusation disguised as a general principle, which is one of the oldest ways to wound someone while keeping your hands clean.

"How Can a Man Be Righteous?" (25)

Bildad's third speech is only six verses long, the shortest in the book. It asks how a man can be righteous before God, or one born of a woman be pure, when even the moon and stars are not pure in his sight. It ends by comparing man to a maggot and a worm (25:4-6).

It is the right question. Job himself has already asked it (9:2), and it is the question the whole Bible answers. But in Bildad's mouth it has no answer at all. It simply ends. The friends' voices are running out. Zophar, as we will see, does not speak a third time.

“Have Pity on Me, My Friends” (19:1–22)

Job’s reply to Bildad’s second speech is one of the most painful passages in the book. “How long will you torment me and crush me with your words?” he asks. “Ten times now you have reproached me” (19:2-3). He overreaches in his anguish, saying that God has wronged him (19:6), a charge the Lord will address from the whirlwind (40:8). Then he lists everyone who has left him: relatives and acquaintances, kinsmen and friends, guests and servants, even his wife and brothers (19:13-19). And then he breaks:

> Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you persecute me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh? (19:21-22, BSB)

The Hebrew verb for “have pity” comes from the same family as *ḥēn*, grace, the root inside *ḥinnām*.[14] Job is begging his friends for grace. What he gets instead is more of what he is already getting from above. The friends have become an extension of his affliction.

Where people get it wrong

“That’s what we’ve always believed.” Tradition deserves respect, and Lutherans are right to give it. But tradition is a witness to Scripture, not a substitute for it, and it is never a tool for deciding what God is doing in a particular person’s life. When the fathers are used to settle a question Scripture leaves open, they have been turned into Bildad.

“God took them because…” Every pastor has heard someone at a funeral explain why God took a child. Jesus flatly refused that logic. The Galileans killed by Pilate and the eighteen crushed by the tower in Siloam were not worse sinners than anyone else (Luke 13:1-5). The man born blind was not blind because of his sin or his parents’ sin (John 9:1-3). Bildad’s theology of Job’s children is the theology Jesus rejected.

“Job 19:6 proves God wronged Job.” Scripture faithfully records Job’s charge that God has wronged him. That does not make the charge true. The book will answer it. Honest lament and accurate doctrine are not the same thing, and the book of Job keeps both in view.

So what

Job cried to his friends, “Have pity on me,” and they would not. The church cries the same words to her Lord every Sunday in the *Kyrie*: “Lord, have mercy.” And he does. What Job’s

friends withheld, Christ gives. He looks on the crowds and has compassion on them (Matthew 9:36). He answers the cry for mercy with the absolution.

That shapes how we use our tradition. The hymns, the liturgy, and the Confessions are gifts, and they are meant to carry Christ's mercy to people in the ashes. They are never meant to be a verdict dropped on them from a safe height.

If you want to go deeper

Read Bildad's three speeches together (chapters 8, 18, and 25) and notice how they shrink. Then read Job 19 through verse 22 and stop there; the rest of the chapter belongs to Session 10. Read Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-7 alongside Job 8:4. For the confessional principle on tradition, read the opening section of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, "Rule and Norm."

Questions for discussion

1. Why might Bildad be an especially tempting model for people who love tradition? Where have you seen tradition used as a weapon?
2. Bildad says Job's children died for their sins (8:4). Why is this so cruel? How should Christians speak at the funeral of someone who died young?
3. What is the difference between tradition as a witness to Scripture and tradition as a judge over a person?
4. Bildad's final question is "how can a mortal be righteous before God?" (25:4). Why does that question have no answer in his mouth? Where does it find its answer?
5. Job begs his friends, "Have pity on me." What does it mean that the church prays "Lord, have mercy" every week?
6. Job's friends became "an extension of his affliction." How can we avoid doing that to people in our own congregation?

14. The verb is *ḥānan*, "to be gracious, to show favor." Job repeats it: *ḥonnunî, ḥonnunî*, "have pity on me, have pity on me." The ancient Greek translation renders it with the verb behind the church's *Kyrie eleison*. See the Hebrew word entry for *ḥinnām* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/hinnam/.

Session 5: Some of Your Sins (Job 11; 20; 12–14; 21)

Zophar the Naamathite is the bluntest of the three friends. He has no night visions and no appeals to the fathers. He simply tells Job that he talks too much and deserves worse than he is getting. He speaks only twice. When his turn comes around a third time, he says nothing at all.

Zophar's speeches are short, and this session will not linger on them. Much of the time is given to Job's replies, which are some of the most daring words in the book, and which contain, in chapter 14, one of its most surprising glimpses of the gospel.

"If Only God Would Speak" (11:1–6)

Zophar opens by treating Job as a windbag: "Should this stream of words go unanswered and such a speaker be vindicated?" (11:2). He misquotes Job as claiming, "My doctrine is sound, and I am pure in Your sight" (11:4). Then he makes a wish:

> But if only God would speak and open His lips against you, (11:5, BSB)

Hold on to that wish. God will speak (38:1), and when he is finished, he will be angry with Zophar and his friends, not with Job (42:7). Zophar is sure he knows what God would say. He is wrong.

What Zophar thinks God would say comes next. If God revealed the secrets of wisdom to Job, "Know then that God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves" (11:6). Other translations render the line differently, but the point is the same: God has let some of your guilt slide, so you are getting less than you deserve.[15] Zophar's idea of good news is that God has forgiven *some* of Job's sins.

"Can You Discover the Essence of God?" (11:7–12)

Zophar then preaches the greatness of God: "Can you fathom the deep things of God or discover the limits of the Almighty?" (11:7). It is higher than heaven, deeper than Sheol, longer than the earth, broader than the sea (11:8-9).

15. The Hebrew of 11:6 is difficult. The NET reads "God has forgiven some of your sins"; other translations read "God exacts from you less than your iniquity deserves." Both readings say the same thing about Zophar's view: Job is getting off lightly.

All true. God's greatness is exactly what the whirlwind speeches will display. But Zophar uses it as a gag. God is beyond you, Job, so stop talking. And then he closes the section with an insult: an empty man will become wise when a wild donkey's colt is born a human being (11:12).

"If You Prove Faithful" (11:13–20)

Like the others, Zophar ends with a conditional promise. If Job will prove faithful, stretch out his hands to God, and put away the iniquity in his hand, then he will lift up his face without blemish, forget his trouble, and live in a brightness like noonday (11:13-17).

Listen to the grammar: *if, if, if… then*. That is the grammar of the law, and there is nothing wrong with it as law. The problem is that Zophar offers it as comfort to a man God has already called blameless. The grammar of the gospel is different. It is not *if you, then God*. It is *because Christ, therefore you*.

The Wicked Man's Short Joy (20)

Zophar's second and last speech is another portrait of the wicked: their joy is brief, their prosperity is swallowed up, and God's anger rains down on them (20:4-29). It is the same theory the others have preached, delivered with more heat. After this Zophar falls silent. Many readers take the missing third speech as a sign that the friends' argument has collapsed under its own weight.

Job's Replies: "Worthless Physicians" (12–13)

Job's answers to Zophar begin with sarcasm: "Truly then you are the people with whom wisdom itself will die" (12:2). He knows everything they know (12:3). His complaint is that a man who called on God and was answered, "The righteous and upright man is a laughingstock!" (12:4).[16]

In chapter 13 Job's frustration sharpens into one of the most important accusations in the book:

> You, however, smear with lies; you are all worthless physicians. If only you would remain silent; for that would be your wisdom! (13:4-5, BSB)

16. The word behind "blameless" here is again *tām*. Job is quoting, in effect, the Lord's own verdict from 1:1 and 1:8, though he does not know he is doing it.

> Will you speak wickedly on God's behalf or speak deceitfully for Him? Would you show Him partiality or argue in His defense? (13:7-8, BSB)

That is the heart of the matter. The friends believe they are defending God. To do it, they have to lie about Job. Job sees that God does not need defenders who will tell lies to protect his reputation, and he warns them that God will rebuke them for it (13:10). He is right (42:7).

Then Job turns from the friends to God and says the most famous words of his first speeches: "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (13:15).[17] He does not know how God will answer. He is sure only that he must bring his case to God himself.

"You Would Cover Over My Sin" (14)

Chapter 14 begins in despair. Man is born of woman, lives a few days full of trouble, grows like a flower and withers (14:1-2). "Who can bring out clean from unclean? No one!" (14:4). A tree cut down can sprout again, but man lies down and does not rise (14:7-12).

And then, right in the middle of the darkness, Job dares to imagine something else:

> When a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, until my renewal comes. You will call, and I will answer; You will desire the work of Your hands. For then You would count my steps, but would not keep track of my sin. My transgression would be sealed in a bag, and You would cover over my iniquity. (14:14-17, BSB)

Set that beside Zophar's "God has forgiven some of your sins." Zophar offers partial leniency from a God who keeps accounts. Job, in his wildest hope, imagines a God who calls his creature back from death, longs for him, and covers over his sin entirely, sealing it away so it is never seen again. Job does not yet know how such a thing could happen. But he has imagined the right thing.

17. This verse contains one of the best-known places in the Hebrew Bible where the written text and the traditional reading differ. The written consonants can be read "I have no hope," while the reading preserved by the scribes is "I will hope in him." The two words sound nearly the same. The NET follows the traditional reading, as most translations do. On how scribes preserved both, see *Ad Fontes: The Old Testament Text*.

"Why Do the Wicked Go on Living?" (21)

Job's final answer to Zophar is a direct refutation of the friends' theory. He begins by asking them simply to listen: "Listen carefully to my words; let this be your consolation to me" (21:2).[18] Listening is the one comfort they have never tried.

Then he states what everyone can see: "Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?" (21:7). Their children are established around them (21:8). Their houses are safe; no rod from God is upon them (21:9). They die in peace (21:13). The friends' theory does not match the world. Job ends with a verdict: "So how can you comfort me with empty words? For your answers remain full of falsehood!" (21:34).

Where people get it wrong

"God forgives, if…" Zophar's gospel has conditions, and it only covers some of the debt. Much popular Christianity sounds the same: God will forgive you once you have cleaned yourself up, and he will forgive the sins you manage to confess well enough. The Scriptures speak otherwise. The Lord forgives all your iniquities (Psalm 103:3). Blessed is the one whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1, quoted in Romans 4:7).

"Defending God" by denying what the sufferer sees. Christians sometimes believe they are protecting God's honor by insisting that a suffering person must have done something, or that things always work out fairly in this life. Job 13:7-8 names that for what it is: speaking deceitfully on God's behalf. God does not need our lies.

"It all evens out in this life." Job 21 says plainly that it does not. The wicked often prosper and die in peace. Scripture places God's final justice at the judgment, not in the quarterly statements of this life.

So what

Every Sunday, in the name of Christ, the pastor declares the forgiveness of *all* your sins. Not some. Not the ones you managed to remember. All. That is what Job longed for in chapter 14: a God who would seal up his offenses in a bag and cover over his sin. In Christ, God has done it. The absolution is not Zophar's partial leniency. It is the covering Job could only imagine.

18. "Consolation" here is a noun from *nāḥam*, the verb of comfort that runs through the whole book. See the Hebrew word entry at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/naham/.

And the friends' failure is a warning to everyone who wants to defend God. You do not honor God by telling a sufferer that his suffering must be deserved. You honor God by bringing the sufferer to the One who covers sin and raises the dead.

If you want to go deeper

Read Zophar's two speeches (chapters 11 and 20), then Job's replies in chapters 12-14 and 21. Spend time with 14:13-17. Then read Psalm 32 and Psalm 103:1-14, and notice how often the word "all" appears.

Questions for discussion

1. Zophar wishes God would speak (11:5). How does that wish look by the end of the book?
2. "God has forgiven some of your sins." Where do you hear that kind of partial gospel today? Where do you sometimes believe it yourself?
3. Job calls his friends "worthless physicians" and says their silence would be wisdom (13:4-5). When is silence the wisest thing a comforter can offer?
4. What does it mean to "speak deceitfully on God's behalf" (13:7)? Have you ever been tempted to do it?
5. In 14:14-17 Job imagines a God who covers sin entirely. How does that hope differ from Zophar's? How is it answered in Christ?
6. Job asks his friends simply to listen (21:2). What would it look like for us to offer that consolation to someone this week?

Session 6: A Hand on Us Both (Job 9–10; 16–17; 23–24)

In his first speech, Eliphaz asked Job a question meant to shut down any hope of help: "Call out if you please, but who will answer? To which of the holy ones will you turn?" (5:1). The implied answer was no one. There is no one to take your side against God.

Job never accepts that answer. Running beneath his arguments with the friends is a longing that grows with each speech: for someone to stand between him and God, to speak for him, to plead his case. This session gathers those passages together. It does not try to finish the thought. Job himself does not finish it until chapter 19, and neither will we until Session 10.

"How Can a Human Be Just Before God?" (9:1–31)

Job's reply to Bildad's first speech begins with a question that has echoed through the centuries:

> "Yes, I know that it is so, but how can a mortal be righteous before God? If one wished to contend with God, he could not answer Him one time out of a thousand. (9:2-3, BSB)

That is the question of the Reformation. It is the question Luther is remembered for asking, in one form or another, through years of anguish in the monastery. And Job asks it not in theory but in a courtroom posture. He knows God is wise and mighty (9:4-10). He knows he cannot answer him: "Although I am innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my judge for mercy" (9:15).

Then he says something startling:

> Even if I were righteous, my mouth would condemn me; if I were blameless, it would declare me guilty. Though I am blameless, I have no concern for myself; I despise my own life. (9:20-21, BSB)

Job is not claiming to be sinless. He has already confessed his sins (7:21), and he will again (13:26). His problem is that even his real integrity cannot give him a place to stand before God. Whatever he says, God is too great for him. He tries to imagine cleaning himself: "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands clean with lye, then you plunge me

into a slimy pit and my own clothes abhor me" (9:30-31). No washing a man can do for himself will make him able to stand before God.

môkîaḥ: "Nor Is There an Arbiter" (9:32–35)

And so Job arrives at the thing he lacks:

> For He is not a man like me, that I can answer Him, that we can take each other to court. Nor is there a mediator between us, to lay his hand upon us both. Let Him remove His rod from me, so that His terror will no longer frighten me. Then I would speak without fear of Him. But as it is, I am on my own. (9:32-35, BSB)

The word for "arbiter" is *môkîaḥ*: one who decides between two parties, an umpire, a judge who hears both sides.[19] Laying a hand on both is the picture of an arbiter with standing on each side, someone both parties must respect. Job's problem is not that his case is weak. It is that no one is great enough to lay a hand on God and near enough to lay a hand on Job.[20]

In chapter 10 Job presses the point from a different angle. He asks God, "Do You have eyes of flesh? Do You see as man sees?" (10:4). God made him, Job says. God's hands shaped him and knit him together with bones and sinews (10:8-11). Why would the Maker now destroy what he made? The questions hang in the air. Job wants a God who could see as he sees, and an arbiter who could stand where he stands. Hold on to those two longings. The New Testament has an answer to both, and we will come to it.

ʿēd: "My Witness Is in Heaven" (16:6–22)

By chapter 16 the longing has grown into something more confident. It begins in the depths. Job's own wasted body has become evidence against him:

> You have bound me, and it has become a witness; my frailty rises up and testifies against me. (16:8, BSB)

19. See the Hebrew word entry for *môkîaḥ* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/mokiah/.
20. The traditional Hebrew text reads "there is no arbiter." The ancient Greek translation and some other witnesses read it as a wish, "Would that there were an arbiter"; in Hebrew the two readings differ by a single letter. The Greek translation also uses the word *mesitēs*, "mediator," the word Paul uses in 1 Timothy 2:5. On the Greek translation of the Old Testament as a witness to its text, see *Ad Fontes: The Old Testament Text*.

His friends look at his ruined flesh and draw the obvious conclusion. But then, a few verses later, Job looks past the evidence on earth:

> O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry for help never be laid to rest. Even now my witness is in heaven, and my advocate is on high. My friends are my scoffers as my eyes pour out tears to God. Oh, that a man might plead with God as he pleads with his neighbor! (16:18-21, BSB)

The word for "witness" is *ʿēd*.[21] "Do not cover my blood" recalls Abel, whose blood cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Job wants his cry to stay unburied until someone answers it. And now he is sure that someone will. Earlier he said there was no arbiter. Now he says there is a witness, an advocate, an intercessor who pleads his case with God.

Who is this witness? Interpreters disagree. Many believe Job is appealing to God himself: from the God whose anger has torn him (16:9) to the God who will testify for him. Others see a heavenly figure distinct from God. The text does not settle it. What it does make clear is that Job is appealing from God to God. He flees from God as he experiences him in his suffering to God as he trusts him to be. Luther would later speak of the difference between God hidden and God revealed, and teach troubled consciences to flee from the one to the other. Job is already doing it.

"O That I Knew Where I Might Find Him" (23)

In chapter 23 the longing becomes a search:

> If only I knew where to find Him, so that I could go to His seat. I would plead my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. (23:3-4, BSB)

Job is confident that if he could only reach God, God would listen: "Would He contend with me in His great power? No, He would certainly take note of me" (23:6). But he cannot find him:

> If I go east, He is not there, and if I go west, I cannot find Him. When He is at work in the north, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the south, I cannot see Him. Yet He knows the way I have taken; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold. (23:8-10, BSB)

21. See the Hebrew word entry for *ʿēd* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/ed/.

This is faith in the dark. Job cannot see God anywhere. His prayers seem to go nowhere. And still he says, "But he knows." He cannot find God, but he trusts that God has not lost him.

The Line Job Is Drawing

Put these passages side by side. In chapter 9, Job wishes there were an arbiter and says there is none. In chapter 16, he declares that his witness is in heaven. In chapter 23, he trusts that God knows his way even when God cannot be found. And in chapter 19, as we will see in the final session, he will say, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Job's hope does not come to him all at once. It grows from wish to confidence to confession. That is worth noticing, because many Christians expect faith to arrive fully formed. Job's did not. It came in fragments, spoken in pain, reaching for someone he could not yet name.

Where people get it wrong

"Job's longing shows a lack of faith." Some readers hear Job's cries for an arbiter and a witness as complaints against God. They are the opposite. They are faith looking for its object. Job refuses to believe that God has abandoned him, even when every piece of evidence says otherwise, and so he looks for someone who can stand between.

"I don't need anyone between me and God." Modern piety often assumes that anyone can approach God directly on his own terms, and that a mediator is an unnecessary middleman. Job knew better. He knew he could not stand before God on his own, however blameless he was. So does the New Testament: there is one mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5).

"The mediator protects us from God." The opposite mistake imagines Christ as a third party shielding us from an angry Father, as if the Son loved us and the Father had to be talked into it. That is not the gospel. The Father sent the Son because he loved the world (John 3:16). The mediator is God himself, come in our flesh.

So what

There are seasons in the Christian life that feel exactly like Job 23. You pray and seem to find no one there. You look east and west and see no trace of God. In those seasons, Job's words belong to you: "But he knows the pathway that I take." Faith does not require that you feel God near. It holds to his Word that he has not let go of you.

And you have what Job was reaching for. There is an arbiter who lays his hand on both God and us. There is a witness in heaven who speaks for you, an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1) who always lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25). That is why the church prays "through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is not a formula tacked on the end. It is the hand on both.

If you want to go deeper

Read Job 9, 16, and 23 in one sitting and trace how Job's hope grows. Then read 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Hebrews 7:23-28, and 1 John 1:8-2:2. The Hebrew word entries for *môkîaḥ* and *ʿēd* go further into both words.

Questions for discussion

1. Eliphaz asked, "Is there anyone who will answer you?" (5:1). How does Job keep answering that question through the rest of the book?
2. "how can a mortal be righteous before God?" (9:2). Why is this such an important question? How would you answer it?
3. Job says his mouth would condemn him even though he is blameless (9:20). What does he mean? Why can't his integrity give him a place to stand?
4. Job wants an arbiter who could "lay his hand on us both." Why does it matter that such an arbiter be both God and man?
5. Job cannot find God anywhere, and still says, "But he knows the pathway that I take" (23:10). Have you ever experienced a season like that? What held you?
6. Job's hope grew over time rather than arriving all at once. How might that encourage someone whose faith feels weak right now?

Session 7: Where Wisdom Is Found (Job 26–28)

By chapter 26 the friends have run out of words. Bildad's last speech was six verses long, and Zophar never takes his third turn. The argument that filled twenty chapters simply stops.

What comes next is one of the most beautiful poems in the Old Testament. Chapter 28 is quiet after all the shouting. It asks a single question, "Where can wisdom be found?", and answers it in a way that reaches all the way back to the first verse of the book.

"The Outer Fringes of His Ways" (26)

Job's reply to Bildad's final speech is a hymn to God's power, greater than anything the friends managed. God stretches the northern sky over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing (26:7). He wraps up the waters in his clouds (26:8). He stills the sea and shatters its monsters (26:12-13). And then Job says that all of this is only the outer fringes of God's ways, the faintest whisper of him; who could understand the thunder of his power (26:14)?

Job has never doubted God's greatness. That was never the question. The friends kept preaching God's power to a man who already believed in it. What Job could not understand was how that power was being used against him.

"I Will Not Put Away My Integrity" (27)

In chapter 27 Job takes an oath. As long as he has breath, he will not speak falsely, and he will not give up his integrity; he will hold on to his righteousness and not let it go (27:2-6). The word for integrity is *tummâ*, the same word the Lord used in 2:3 and Job's wife threw at him in 2:9.

The rest of the chapter (27:13-23) is a description of the fate of the wicked that sounds remarkably like the friends. Interpreters have long debated it. Some think Job is turning the friends' own teaching back on them; others think the text preserves a lost third speech of Zophar. The Hebrew as we have it gives the words to Job, and this study leaves the question open.[22]

22. Chapter 28 itself has no introduction naming a speaker, and some interpreters read it as the voice of the book rather than of Job. The questions about chapters 27 and 28 are real, but they do not change what the poem teaches.

"Surely There Is a Mine for Silver" (28:1–11)

Chapter 28 begins in a mine. Human beings know how to find silver and refine gold, how to take iron from the ground and copper from the rock (28:1-2). They sink shafts far from where anyone lives and dangle on ropes in the dark (28:3-4). They go where no bird of prey has ever seen, where no lion has walked (28:7-8). They cut channels through rock and overturn mountains at their roots (28:9-10).

The poem is admiring. Human ingenuity is remarkable, and it has only grown since these lines were written. We have gone deeper into the earth and farther into the sky than any ancient miner could have dreamed.

"Where Can Wisdom Be Found?" (28:12–22)

But the poem turns. For all our skill, there is one thing we cannot dig up: wisdom. No one knows the way to it. The deep says it is not in me, and the sea says it is not with me (28:14). It cannot be bought with gold or silver or precious stones (28:15-19). It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing. Even Destruction and Death say, "We have heard a rumor about it" (28:22).

This is exactly what the friends did not understand. They thought wisdom was something a person could possess: a vision, a tradition, a formula. They mined their experience and their sources and came up with explanations. The poem says wisdom is not that kind of thing.

"God Understands the Way to It" (28:23–28)

> But God understands its way, and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. (28:23-24, BSB)

When God set the weight of the wind and measured the waters, when he gave the rain its limit and the thunderstorm its path, he looked at wisdom, weighed it, and established it (28:25-27). And then he said to humankind that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding (28:28).

Listen to those last two phrases. "Fear the Lord" and "turn away from evil" are the exact words the book used to describe Job in its first verse: he "feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). The Lord said it again in 1:8 and 2:3.

So the poem's answer to "Where can wisdom be found?" points straight back at the man on the ash heap. Job never had an explanation for his suffering. He still does not. But by

the book's own definition, he had wisdom all along. The friends had explanations without wisdom. Job had wisdom without explanations.

Wisdom Hidden in Christ

The New Testament takes this further. Paul calls Christ the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), the one who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). He says that in Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Colossians 2:3). The poem imagined wisdom as a treasure no miner could reach. Paul says it has a location. It is hidden in a person, and that person has come to us.

And the fear of the Lord is where the Small Catechism begins, too. Every explanation of the Ten Commandments starts from the First: "We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things" (Small Catechism I, 2). That is not a theory about suffering. It is a posture of the heart toward God, and it is available to the sufferer who has no theory at all.

Where people get it wrong

"Wisdom means having the answers." We tend to think the wise person is the one who can explain things. Job 28 says otherwise. The wise person is the one who fears God and turns from evil, whether or not he can explain anything. Some of the wisest Christians you know may be people who have never been able to say why their suffering came.

"The fear of the Lord means being afraid of God." The fear of the Lord includes awe before his majesty, and it is not casual. But Scripture does not mean the terror of a slave who expects punishment. It means the reverence of a child who knows the Father is holy and trusts him anyway. Job's fear of God drove him toward God, even when he was arguing with him.

"Enough knowledge will get us there." The mining poem is a quiet rebuke to every age that believes human ingenuity can reach the deepest things. We can go almost anywhere. We cannot dig our way to God. Wisdom must be given.

So what

If you are suffering and have no explanation, you are not thereby lacking wisdom. You may be standing exactly where Job stood: fearing God, turning from evil, and not knowing why. The poem calls that wisdom.

And if you are the one trying to help someone who suffers, you do not need to supply the explanation. You can point them to where wisdom actually lives: in Christ, in whom all its treasures are hidden, and who gives himself to us in his Word and Sacraments.

If you want to go deeper

Read Job 28 aloud, slowly, as the poem it is. Then read Proverbs 8, where wisdom speaks in her own voice, and 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Finally, read the Small Catechism's explanation of the First Commandment and notice how every other explanation begins with the words "We are to fear and love God."

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think the book places this quiet poem right after the friends fall silent?
2. The poem admires human skill before it turns. What are the "mines" of our own age, and what can they not reach?
3. The phrases in 28:28 echo 1:1. What does it mean that Job had wisdom all along, even without an explanation?
4. How would you explain the difference between the fear of a slave and the fear of a child?
5. Paul says all the treasures of wisdom are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3). How does that change the search the poem describes?
6. Think of someone you consider truly wise. Is their wisdom a matter of answers, or of something else?

Session 8: The Fourth Voice (Job 29–37)

Before the Lord speaks, two more things happen. First, Job rests his case. In chapters 29 through 31 he surveys his whole life: what it was, what it has become, and what he swears it has never been. He signs his name to it and demands an answer.

Then, instead of God, a new voice speaks. Elihu has not been mentioned before. He will not be mentioned again. For six chapters he holds the floor, and then he disappears. Readers have argued about him for centuries. This session tries to give him a fair hearing.

"The Months of Old" (29)

Job begins by remembering. He longs for the days when God watched over him, when his children were around him, when the young men stepped aside as he passed and the old men stood up (29:2-8). He was honored because he was just. He rescued the poor who cried for help and the orphan who had no one. He was eyes for the blind and feet for the lame, a father to the needy (29:12-16).

This is Job's answer to Eliphaz, who accused him of stripping the poor and sending widows away empty (22:6-9). Job's actual life was the opposite.

"But Now" (30)

Chapter 30 turns on the words "but now." Now he is mocked by young men whose fathers he would not have set with his sheepdogs (30:1). Now he is a byword, and people spit at him (30:9-10). Now he cries to God and God does not answer (30:20). His harp is tuned to mourning (30:31).

"Here Is My Signature" (31)

Chapter 31 is Job's oath of innocence, and it is one of the most searching moral inventories in Scripture. He has made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully (31:1). He has not denied justice to his servants, because the God who made him made them too (31:13-15). He has not withheld from the poor, trusted in gold, worshiped the sun or moon, or rejoiced when his enemy fell (31:16-29). He has not hidden his transgressions in his heart (31:33).

Then he signs his name: "Oh, that I had one to hear me!" (31:35). Let the Almighty answer. Let the accuser write down the charge. The chapter ends with a simple line: the words of Job are ended (31:40).

Lutherans should read chapter 31 with respect. The Augsburg Confession teaches that human beings have some freedom to achieve civil righteousness, an outward uprightness in their dealings with others (Augsburg Confession XVIII). Job 31 is civil righteousness at its very best. It is real, it is good, and God himself has vouched for it. But Job's own question from chapter 9 still stands over it: "How can a human be just before God?" (9:2). A life like the one in chapter 31 is a gift to every neighbor it touches. It cannot justify a man before God.

Elihu Arrives (32)

Now a young man named Elihu speaks. He has waited because the others were older, but he is angry: angry at Job for justifying himself rather than God, and angry at the three friends because they condemned Job without finding an answer (32:2-3). He has waited long enough. It is not age that gives wisdom, he says, but the spirit in a person (32:8-9).

Elihu is wordy; he spends most of a chapter announcing that he is about to speak. Many readers find him tiresome. But when he finally gets to his point, he says some things none of the others said.

"One Mediator Out of a Thousand" (33)

Elihu begins by offering himself to Job in words that echo Job's own longing:

> I am just like you before God; I was also formed from clay. Surely no fear of me should terrify you; nor will my hand be heavy upon you. (33:6-7, BSB)

In chapter 9 Job wished for an arbiter whose terror would not make him afraid (9:34). Elihu presents himself as something like that: a man of clay, no threat to Job. But he is only a man. He can speak to Job; he cannot lay his hand on God.

Then Elihu says something new. God speaks, he insists, in more than one way: in dreams and visions, and also through pain (33:14-22). Suffering is not only punishment for past sin. It can be God's way of turning a person back from the pit. And then comes one of the clearest gospel passages in the Old Testament:

> Yet if there is a messenger on his side, one mediator in a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the Pit; I have found his ransom,' then his flesh is refreshed like a child's; he returns to the days of his youth. (33:23-25, BSB)

The word for "mediator" here is the same word Job used in 16:20 for his "intercessor."[23] Elihu has picked up Job's longing and given it a shape. There is a mediator. God is gracious. God says, *I have found a ransom*.

And the one who is spared sings about it: "I have sinned and perverted what was right; yet I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit, and I will live to see the light!" (33:27-28). That is the song of every forgiven sinner.

A ransom is a price paid to set someone free. The psalmist knew no human being could pay it for another (Psalm 49:7-8). Jesus said he came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), and Paul says he gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6).[24] Elihu could only speak of it in the conditional: *if* there is a mediator, *if* God says he has found a ransom. The gospel speaks of it as done.

Elihu Hardens (34–37)

Unfortunately, Elihu does not stop there. In chapters 34 through 37 he drifts back toward the friends' position. He insists that God cannot do wrong, which is true, and concludes that Job adds rebellion to his sin by speaking as he has (34:37), which is not. He does add one more important thought: God delivers the afflicted by means of their affliction and opens their ears through oppression (36:15). And as he closes, he begins describing a storm, the thunder and lightning and the majesty of God coming out of the north (37:1-24).

It is as if Elihu can see the whirlwind coming on the horizon. In the next verse, it arrives.

What to Make of Elihu

Here is something the book wants us to notice. When the Lord speaks in the epilogue, he rebukes Eliphaz and his two friends by name (42:7). Elihu is not mentioned. He is neither rebuked nor commended.

That silence should make us careful. Elihu is not simply a fourth miserable comforter. He says true and important things the others never said: that suffering can be instruction rather than punishment, and that God finds a ransom for the one going down to the pit. But he also repeats some of their errors, accusing Job of rebellion he did not commit. The

23. The word is *mēlîṣ*, which can mean an interpreter, a spokesman, or an intercessor. It appears in both 16:20 and 33:23.
24. The word Elihu uses is *kōper*, a ransom price or covering. On the New Testament vocabulary of ransom, see the Explorer entry for *lytron* at larryherzogjr.com/greek/lytron/.

book leaves him in between, and this study will too. Treat his ransom speech as the gospel text it is. Do not treat him as the book's final word. That belongs to the Lord.

Where people get it wrong

"Elihu is just a fourth friend." It is easy to lump him in with the others, especially since he is long-winded and young. But the book distinguishes him. He is not rebuked, and he speaks one of the clearest promises of redemption in the Old Testament.

"Elihu has the answer." The opposite mistake treats Elihu as the voice of truth who finally explains Job's suffering. If that were so, the Lord's speeches would be unnecessary. Elihu prepares the way; he does not arrive at the destination.

"Job 31 is self-righteousness." Job's oath can sound proud to modern ears. But the Lord himself called Job upright, and Lutherans have language for this: civil righteousness is real and good. The error would be to think it could justify Job before God, and Job never claims that it does. What he demands is a hearing.

So what

Elihu said, "I have found a ransom," as a possibility. The gospel says it as a fact. God has found the ransom, and it is his own Son. That is what you hear every time the Word is preached and the Sacrament is given: not *if* God might be gracious, but *that* he has been, for you.

And Elihu's other insight deserves a place in our comfort. Suffering is not always punishment. Sometimes it is the way God opens our ears. That is not an explanation to hand to someone in the first hours of grief. It is a truth to hold for the long road, when the sufferer is ready to hear that God has not wasted even this.

If you want to go deeper

Read Job 31 slowly and use it as a mirror for your own life. Then read Elihu's ransom speech (33:14-30) alongside Psalm 49:7-15, Mark 10:45, and 1 Timothy 2:5-6. For the confessional teaching on civil righteousness, read Augsburg Confession XVIII.

Questions for discussion

1. Job 31 is a remarkable moral inventory. Which of its commitments challenges you most?

2. What is civil righteousness? Why is it good, and why can it not justify us before God?
3. Elihu offers himself as a man of clay who will not terrify Job (33:6-7). Why is that not enough?
4. Read 33:23-28 aloud. Where do you hear the gospel in it? What is still missing?
5. Elihu is not rebuked in 42:7. How does that shape the way you read him?
6. Elihu says God sometimes opens our ears through suffering (36:15). When is that a comfort, and when would it be the wrong thing to say?

Session 9: Out of the Whirlwind (Job 38:1–42:6)

Everyone in the book has been waiting for this. Zophar wished that God would speak (11:5). Job begged for an answer and signed his name to his demand (31:35). Elihu insisted that God does not answer all of a person's words (33:13). And now:

> Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: (38:1, BSB)

The first thing to notice is simply that he came. Job said, "If only I knew where to find Him" (23:3). He did not find God. God found him.

The second thing to notice is the name. Throughout the dialogues, Job and his friends speak of God with general words: *El*, *Eloah*, *Shaddai*, "the Almighty." The personal covenant name of God, the one English Bibles print as "the Lord," is used in the prologue and the epilogue, but almost never in the dialogues.[25] Now it returns. The one who speaks from the whirlwind is not a philosophical concept. It is the Lord.

And the third thing to notice is what he says. He does not explain. He never mentions the heavenly court, the Accuser, or the challenge Job knew nothing about. He answers Job's questions with questions of his own.

"Who Is This Who Darkens Counsel?" (38:1–3)

> "Who is this who obscures My counsel by words without knowledge? Now brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall inform Me. (38:2-3, BSB)

Notice what the Lord rebukes. It is not Job's lament. It is not his grief or his cry for help. It is words "without knowledge": the places where Job, in his anguish, claimed to know what God was doing and why. Job had said God was his enemy, that God had wronged him (19:6), that God destroys the blameless and the wicked alike (9:22). Those are the words the Lord challenges. The lament itself, the crying out, is never rebuked. In a few chapters the Lord will say that Job spoke rightly about him (42:7).

25. The covenant name appears in the dialogues only at 12:9. Its return at 38:1 is one of the clearest signals that the book has turned a corner.

"Where Were You?" (38:4–38)

> Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. (38:4, BSB)

The Lord takes Job back to the beginning. Who set the earth's measurements? Who laid its cornerstone, "while the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (38:6-7). The sons of God were in the heavenly court in chapter 1. They are here again, but singing at creation, not debating Job.

Then the Lord speaks of the sea:

> Who enclosed the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its blanket, when I fixed its boundaries and set in place its bars and doors, and I declared: 'You may come this far, but no farther; here your proud waves must stop'? (38:8-11, BSB)

For the ancient world, the sea was chaos itself. Here the Lord speaks of it as a newborn. He swaddles it in darkness like an infant and sets its limits. Remember Job's curse in chapter 3. He wanted his birthday wrapped in darkness and called on those who could rouse the chaos monster (3:4-8). The Lord answers with a birth of his own. He wraps chaos in a swaddling band and tells it where to stop.

The questions go on: the dawn, the depths, the gates of death, the storehouses of snow, the paths of lightning, the constellations (38:12-38). Has Job commanded the morning? Has he walked in the recesses of the deep? The point is not to humiliate Job. It is to widen his view. The world is vast and ordered and far beyond him, and all of it is in the Lord's hands.

"Can You Hunt Prey for the Lion?" (38:39–39:30)

Then the Lord turns to the animals, and the choice of animals is striking. Not the sheep and oxen that served Job, but the wild ones: the lioness and her cubs, the raven's young crying to God for food, the mountain goats giving birth where no one watches, the wild donkey who scorns the city, the wild ox no one can harness, the ostrich who is careless with her eggs and still outruns the horse, the war horse who laughs at fear, the hawk and the eagle (38:39-39:30).

These creatures are of no use to Job at all. And the Lord feeds them, watches their births, and delights in them. The world does not revolve around Job, or around any of us. The

Lord cares for things we never see. If he attends to the raven's young and the mountain goat in labor, he has not forgotten a man on an ash heap.

"I Put My Hand over My Mouth" (40:1–5)

The Lord pauses: "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who argues with God give an answer!" (40:2). And Job, who had signed his name and demanded a hearing, has nothing left to say:

> "Behold, I am insignificant. How can I reply to You? I place my hand over my mouth. I have spoken once, but I have no answer—twice, but I have nothing to add." (40:4-5, BSB)

That is not yet repentance. It is silence. Job has stopped accusing. But the Lord is not finished.

"Would You Indeed Annul My Justice?" (40:6–14)

The second speech goes to the heart of the matter:

> Would you really annul My justice? Would you condemn Me to justify yourself? (40:8, BSB)

This is where Job had overreached. It was one thing to insist on his integrity. It was another to insist on it by putting God in the wrong. The Lord invites Job to try ruling the world himself: to clothe himself with majesty, to bring down the proud, to crush the wicked. If he can do that, the Lord says, "Then I will confess to you that your own right hand can save you" (40:14).

No one's right hand can save him. Not Job's, however upright. Not ours. That is the lesson of the whole book compressed into one sentence, and it is the lesson of the Reformation too.

Behemoth and Leviathan (40:15–41:34)

The Lord ends with two great beasts. The first is Behemoth, "which I made as I made you" (40:15), a creature of enormous strength. The second is Leviathan, the monster Job called on in his curse in chapter 3.

The Lord describes Leviathan at length: its armor, its terrible teeth, the fire of its breath, the fear it strikes into the mighty. No one can capture it or tame it. And yet the Lord speaks of it as his creature, something he could play with the way a person plays with a bird (41:5). Chaos, like the Accuser, is on the Lord's leash.

In the middle of this speech the Lord says something Paul would later quote:

> Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Everything under heaven is Mine. (41:11, BSB)

No one has ever put God in his debt. No one has given to him first so that he owes a return.[26] Here the book circles back to its opening word. The Accuser assumed Job's faith was a transaction. The friends assumed God paid out blessing and punishment according to merit. The Lord says no one has ever given him anything that he must repay. Everything is his, and everything he gives is given for nothing, *ḥinnām*.

"Now My Eye Has Seen You" (42:1–6)

Job's second answer is different from his first:

> "I know that You can do all things and that no plan of Yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this who conceals My counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself, and I repent in dust and ashes." (42:2-3, 5-6, BSB)

The Lord gave Job no explanation. He gave Job himself. "My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You." That is the answer. Not a reason, but a presence.

And Job's response is expressed with *nāḥam*, the verb of comfort that has run through the whole book.[27] The friends came to *nāḥam* him and failed (2:11; 16:2). Now Job *nāḥam*s. The NET translates it "repent," and Job is certainly turning from words spoken without knowledge (42:3). But the verse is famously difficult, and it can also be read as "I am comforted concerning dust and ashes," that is, about being mortal.[28] Both meanings may be present.

26. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:35, at the end of his great hymn to the depth of God's riches and wisdom. The verse numbers in Job 41 differ between English and Hebrew Bibles; in Hebrew this is 41:3.
27. See the Hebrew word entry for *nāḥam* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/naham/.
28. The first verb in 42:6 also has no object in Hebrew; the NET supplies "myself," while other translations supply "my words" and render it "I retract." The NET's translator notes lay out the options. The NET's reading is well supported; the alternatives are real.

Job repents of accusing God, and in the same breath he is comforted, because God has come.

God Hidden and God Revealed

This is where the distinction Luther drew in *The Bondage of the Will* comes into its own. There is God as he is hidden: in his majesty, in the whirlwind, in his governing of all things, including the things we cannot understand. And there is God as he has revealed himself: clothed in his Word, preached, given to us. We are not called to search out the hidden God. We are called to cling to the God who has spoken.

Luther's Heidelberg Disputation says that the one who deserves to be called a theologian is the one who understands the visible things of God through suffering and the cross (thesis 20). The book never shows Job learning why he suffered. What he learned was who God is. And the Christian learns even more than Job did: that the God who spoke from the whirlwind would one day speak from a cross, and answer human suffering not by explaining it but by entering it.

Where people get it wrong

"God just bullied Job into silence." Some readers hear the whirlwind speeches as a display of raw power: I am bigger than you, so be quiet. But consider what actually happens. The Creator of the universe comes in person to a ruined man on an ash heap and speaks with him at length. He takes Job seriously enough to answer him. The questions are not a threat. They are an invitation to trust the One who holds the lion, the raven, and Leviathan in his hand.

"God finally explained it." He did not. The Lord never mentions the heavenly court. The book never shows Job learning of the Accuser's challenge. Anyone who says the whirlwind speeches explain Job's suffering has read something into them. What God gives is himself.

"Job 42:6 shows Job hating himself." The verse is not a model of self-loathing, and it does not prove the friends were right. Job turns away from the words he spoke without knowledge. He does not confess the secret sins the friends invented, because there were none (42:7).

So what

Most of us will not receive an explanation for our suffering either. The whirlwind speeches teach us that this is not the worst thing. The worst thing would be for God to stay away. He does not. He comes.

He does not come to us in a whirlwind. He comes in the Word preached into our ears, in the water poured over our heads, in the body and blood placed in our mouths. Job said, "Now my eye has seen you." We walk by faith, not yet by sight. But the God who showed himself to Job is the God who has shown himself to us in Christ, and he will not leave us on the ash heap.

If you want to go deeper

Read chapters 38 and 39 aloud in one sitting and let the sheer range of the questions sink in. Then read Psalm 104, which celebrates many of the same creatures, and Romans 11:33-36, where Paul quotes Job 41:11. For Luther's distinction between the hidden and revealed God, a good place to begin is the section of *The Bondage of the Will* on God preached and God not preached.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think God answers Job with questions instead of explanations?
2. The Lord rebukes Job's words "without knowledge" but not his lament. Why does that distinction matter?
3. Why might the Lord point Job to wild animals that are of no use to him?
4. "Your own right hand can save you" (40:14). What is the Lord teaching Job with that sentence?
5. Job says, "My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You." How is receiving God himself different from receiving an explanation?
6. How does the cross change what the whirlwind means for us?

Session 10: My Redeemer Lives (Job 19:23–29; 42:7–17)

We began with a question: "Is it for nothing that Job fears God?" (1:9). This last session brings together two passages that answer it. The first is Job's great confession in chapter 19, which we set aside in Session 4 so it could stand here. The second is the ending of the book.

The front matter promised that this study would end where Job could say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Here we are.

"O That My Words Were Written Down" (19:23–24)

Remember where Job is in chapter 19. His kinsmen have failed him. His friends have forgotten him. His breath is repulsive to his wife. He has begged his friends for pity and received none (19:13-22). And then, out of that lowest place, he wishes that his words could be written in a book, carved into rock with an iron chisel and lead, preserved forever (19:23-24).

He got his wish. His words were written down. You have been reading them for ten weeks.

gōʾēl: "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" (19:25–27)

> But I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I will see Him for myself; my eyes will behold Him, and not as a stranger. How my heart yearns within me! (19:25-27, BSB)

The word for "Redeemer" is *gōʾēl*.[29] In Israel, the *gōʾēl* was the next of kin, the family member whose duty it was to step in when a relative could not help himself. He bought back land that had been sold (Leviticus 25:25). He redeemed a relative sold into servitude (25:47-49). He avenged a relative's blood (Numbers 35:19). Boaz was the *gōʾēl* for Naomi's family (Ruth 3-4). Two things were always true of the *gōʾēl*: he was kin, and he paid.

Now remember what Job said just a few verses earlier: "My kinsmen have failed me" (19:14). The people whose duty it was to redeem him had abandoned him. The *gōʾēl* Job knows is alive must be someone else.

29. See the Hebrew word entry for *gōʾēl* at larryherzogjr.com/hebrew/goel/.

He is "the last." The word is *ʾaḥărôn* , and Isaiah puts it in the Lord's own mouth in the same verse where he calls himself Israel's *gōʾēl*: "I am the first and I am the last" (Isaiah 44:6). And the Redeemer will stand "upon the earth," or more literally, upon the dust, the very dust Job expects to lie in (7:21). The Redeemer stands where the dead are buried.

Isaiah calls the Lord himself Israel's *gōʾēl* again and again (Isaiah 41:14; 43:14). But a *gōʾēl* must be kin. How can God be next of kin to a man? The New Testament answers: the Son shared our flesh and blood, and "He had to be made like His brothers in every way" (Hebrews 2:17). God became our relative so that he could redeem us as family. And he paid, not with silver or gold, but with his own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

"In My Flesh I Will See God"

Job's confession reaches toward the resurrection of the body. The front matter promised honesty about difficult Hebrew, and this is where that promise is tested.

Verses 25 through 27 contain some of the hardest Hebrew in the book. In verse 26, the little word translated "in my flesh" can also be read "apart from my flesh." The ancient Greek translation renders the whole passage quite differently.[30] Honest readers should say so.

But notice what verse 27 insists on, whichever way verse 26 is read: "whom I will see for myself, and whom my own eyes will behold, and not another." Not a disembodied spirit. Not someone else in his place. Job himself, with his own eyes. That is bodily hope.

And the Christian confession of the resurrection does not rest on this verse alone. It rests on the risen Christ, who showed his disciples his hands and feet and said a spirit does not have flesh and bones as he had (Luke 24:39). It rests on Paul's teaching that what is sown perishable is raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42). Job's confession is one early voice in a long chorus, and the church has been right to sing it at the graves of the faithful for centuries. Job asked in chapter 14, "If a man dies, will he live again?" (14:14). Here is his answer.

"My Servant Job" (42:7–9)

Now we turn to the ending. After the Lord has spoken to Job, he turns to Eliphaz. His anger burns against the three friends, because they have not spoken about him what is right, as his servant Job has (42:7). And he gives them instructions:

30. The Greek reads, in effect, "For I know that he is eternal who is about to deliver me." On the Greek translation as a witness to the Old Testament text, and on how to weigh passages where the Hebrew is difficult, see *Ad Fontes: The Old Testament Text*.

> So now, take seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. Then My servant Job will pray for you, for I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken accurately about Me, as My servant Job has." (42:8, BSB)

Four times in two verses, the Lord calls Job "my servant."[31] The friends who accused him must now bring a sacrifice to him and depend on his prayer. The book began with Job offering burnt offerings for his children (1:5). It ends with Job at the altar again, praying for the men who wounded him.

There is a remarkable detail in the word for "intercede." The NET's translators note that the root carries the idea of arbitration.[32] In chapter 9 Job longed for an arbiter to stand between him and God. Now he stands between God and his accusers. The man who had no arbiter becomes one.

Here the book offers its clearest picture of Christ. The innocent sufferer, rejected and accused, is vindicated by God, and his prayer is accepted for the very people who condemned him. Isaiah says the Lord's Servant would bear the sin of many and intercede for transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). On the cross, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). Job is not Christ. But in this moment he looks very much like him.

"After He Prayed for His Friends" (42:10–11)

> After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his prosperity and doubled his former possessions. All his brothers and sisters and prior acquaintances came and dined with him in his house. They consoled him and comforted him over all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. And each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. (42:10-11, BSB)

Two things stand out. First, the restoration comes *after* Job prays for his friends. The order matters. Job's fortunes do not turn when he wins the argument. They turn after he forgives.

31. The Hebrew is *ʿabdî*, "my servant," the title the Lord gave Job in 1:8 and 2:3. It is also the title Isaiah uses for the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1; 52:13), whose song ends with the intercession quoted below. The echo is in the vocabulary; the book of Job does not draw the line itself.
32. The NET's note on 42:8 explains that the verb is from the root *pālal*, whose main idea is arbitration; in this form it means to seek arbitration, to pray, or to intercede.

Second, comfort finally arrives. In chapter 2 the friends came "go and sympathize with Job and comfort him" (2:11), and failed. Now the same two verbs return: his family comes and comforts and consoles him (42:11). The *nāḥam* that failed at the beginning of the book is given at the end. And notice that the book does not take back what it said about the source of Job's trouble. It was "all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him." The comfort does not come from explaining the trouble away. It comes from people who finally sit at the table with him.

Gift, Not Wages (42:12–17)

The Lord blessed the second part of Job's life more than the first (42:12). Compare the numbers with 1:3 and you will find that every flock and herd is exactly doubled: seven thousand sheep become fourteen thousand, three thousand camels become six thousand, five hundred yoke of oxen become a thousand, five hundred donkeys become a thousand.

But the children are not doubled. Job had seven sons and three daughters before. He has seven sons and three daughters now (42:13). Interpreters across the centuries have noticed this and drawn a quiet conclusion: Job's first ten children were not lost in the way his livestock were lost. They were still his. The doubling was complete after all, if the first ten are counted among the living. The text does not say this in so many words, and we should not claim more than it says. But it is a gentle and fitting reading for a book that has already confessed, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

The daughters are named: Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-happuch. They are the most beautiful women in the land, and their father gives them an inheritance along with their brothers (42:14-15), an unusual gift in that world. Job lives a hundred and forty years and sees four generations. "And so Job died, old and full of years" (42:17).

This ending must be read carefully. It is not a prosperity text. It does not promise that every sufferer's losses will be replaced in this life, and many faithful people die before any such restoration comes. Job's restoration is not payment for passing a test; as far as the book tells us, he never learned there was one. It is gift. It comes *ḥinnām*, for nothing, from a God who owes no one anything (41:11) and gives anyway. And for the Christian it is a picture, not the whole promise. The full restoration waits for the day when God wipes away every tear and death is no more (Revelation 21:4).

For Nothing

Here is the answer to the question that began the book. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" The Accuser said no. Job's faith was a business, and without the payments it would collapse.

Job's faith did not collapse. It shook, it argued, it cried out in the dark. But it held on to God when there was nothing in it for Job at all, and it reached, through all its pain, for a Redeemer it could not yet see.

And yet the deepest answer to the Accuser is not about Job. It is about God. Job's faith held because God held Job. The Redeemer lived. God gave, and gave again, for nothing. He still does. We are justified freely by his grace (Romans 3:24). Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). We bring nothing. The answer to "Is it for nothing?" is the gospel itself: yes. Everything God gives, he gives for nothing. And that is exactly why it can be trusted.

Where people get it wrong

"Be faithful, and God will double your blessings." This is the Accuser's theology dressed up as a promise. The epilogue describes a gift, not a formula, and it arrives after a sacrifice and an act of forgiveness, not after a performance of faith.

"Job 19:25 is about spiritual survival." Some readers turn Job's confession into a vague hope that his spirit or his memory would live on. Job said "in my flesh" and "my own eyes." Whatever the textual difficulties, the confession reaches for bodily resurrection, and the New Testament confirms that reach.

"Job earned his reward by patience." Job's endurance was real, and James honors it (James 5:11). But James's point is that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. The end of Job's story reveals the Lord's character, not Job's merit.

So what

You were baptized into Christ's death, so that just as he was raised from the dead, you too will walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4-5). Your Redeemer lives. He stands upon the dust where the dead lie, and he will raise you up. In your flesh you will see God, with your own eyes, and not another.

Until then, you are fed at his table with his body and blood, a foretaste of the feast to come. And when the church gathers at the grave of one of her own, she can say what Job said, and say it with more knowledge than Job had: "I know that my Redeemer lives." Not because we have an explanation. Because we have him.

If you want to go deeper

Read Job 19:23-27 alongside 1 Corinthians 15:12-58. Then read Job 42 alongside 1:1-5 and notice everything that returns: the burnt offerings, the prayer for others, the number ten, the phrase "my servant Job." Finally, read Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the song of the Servant who bore the sin of many and interceded for transgressors. The Hebrew word entry for *gōʾēl* goes further into the kinsman-redeemer and the textual questions in 19:25-27.

Questions for discussion

1. Job's confession in 19:25 comes right after he says his kinsmen have failed him. Why does that setting matter?
2. What does it mean that a *gōʾēl* must be kin? How does the incarnation answer that?
3. Why is it significant that Job prays for his friends before his fortunes are restored?
4. The livestock are doubled but the children are not. What do you make of that?
5. How can we read the ending of Job as gift rather than as a promise of prosperity?
6. After ten sessions, how would you now answer the Accuser's question, "Is it for nothing?"