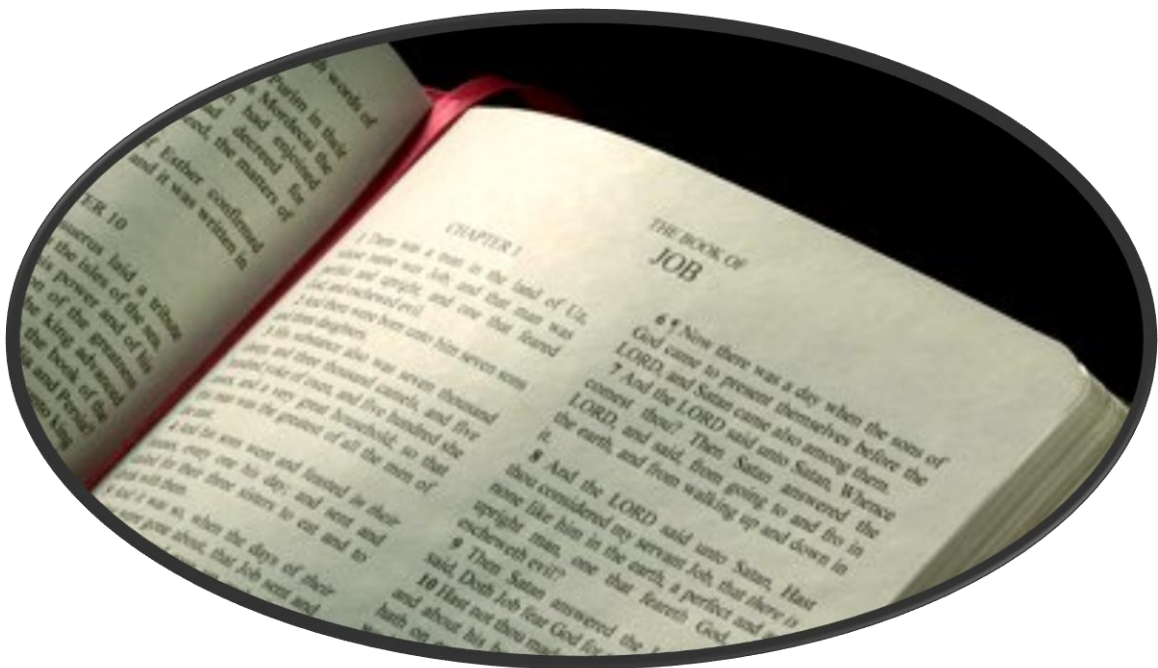


JOB

JOB'S FRIENDS WEAR HIM DOWN



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Job 9:1-12:25: Job's Friends Wear Him Down

Job notes the obvious empirical evidence disproving their theology of instant justice.

But he gets caught up in the details of his innocence. He's starting to lose perspective.

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Thank you.

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1 Job 9:1-24 (ESV)

Then Job answered and said:

“Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?— he who removes mountains, and they know it not, when he overturns them in his anger, who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun, and it does not rise; who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea; who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south; who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’

“God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice. For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life. It is all one; therefore I say, ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’ When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges— if it is not he, who then is it?

As righteous as Job is, he knows he’s not perfect and therefore God is not wrong to punish him. *“But how can a man be in the right before God? ... If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?”*

But his friends aren’t accusing him of falling short of perfection; they’re accusing him of major sin. Job is calmly reasoning with them, trying to disprove their accusation – which is pretty amazing given that he’s in agony the whole time.

He’s displaying the patience of Job.

Pray for our nation and its leaders. Specifically, pray for our leaders to be more patient. Politics is supposed to be about debate and reaching consensus and compromise. That’s what makes a democratic republic like ours work.

But this is an everlasting challenge. Disagreement is part of the process. Each new disagreement feels special, but it isn’t.

Our country always has been, and always will be, run by sinners. We need our leaders to be more patient.

Then again, what we really need is a revival.

2 Job 9:25-10:7 (ESV)

“My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey. If I say, ‘I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and be of good cheer,’ I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent. I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain? If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.

“I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked? Have you eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees? Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years, that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand?”

Job is starting to slip. He got trapped in an argument over whether he committed a sin worthy of this terrible punishment. Now he's let himself get sucked into accepting the premise of the argument – that this must be God's response to some specific sin he committed.

This leads Job to consider what he knows is impossible – that God has it wrong. *Have you eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees?*

Of course not. Job knows that God sees all and so, in his rising confusion, he adds, *“although you know that I am not guilty.”*

Job's friends are wearing him down. It's like they're beating on a coconut with a hammer, knowing that it'll crack eventually.

Of course, Job's friends have no idea that they're doing this. They think they're being helpful. They're giving him the best advice they have to offer.

But notice what they're not doing – praying. Now, at this point in history, prayer may not have been the typical way of talking to God, but something was. Job has been talking to God a lot here. His friends have done none of that.

Christians sometimes make a similar mistake. Prayer requests are requests for prayer, not advice. Advice in response to a prayer request can offend people.

It sounds condescending.

3 Job 10:8-22 (ESV)

“Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit. Yet these things you hid in your heart; I know that this was your purpose. If I sin, you watch me and do not acquit me of my iniquity. If I am guilty, woe to me! If I am in the right, I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace and look on my affliction. And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion and again work wonders against me. You renew your witnesses against me and increase your vexation toward me; you bring fresh troops against me.

“Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.”

Job's view of things is getting darker – literally. In Chapter 3, he spoke of the grave in positive terms. *I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept; then I would have been at rest ... There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.* – Job 3:13, 17 (ESV)

Now his view is gloomier. *Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go—and I shall not return—to the land of darkness and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow without any order, where light is as thick darkness.*

But there is still one ray of hope. He knows that God is in control, and may yet, *“cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer before I go.”*

Job is right about that. His torment isn't a done deal. At any moment God could relent.

In fact, God will grant this request.

Some prayer requests take longer than others. It's not easy to keep praying for something after you've watched your request be denied over and over. But Jesus was absolutely clear on this.

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” – Luke 18:1-5

The toughest prayers are the most glorifying.

4 Job 11:1-20 (ESV)

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

“Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right? Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God’s eyes.’ But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. If he passes through and imprisons and summons the court, who can turn him back? For he knows worthless men; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it? But a stupid man will get understanding when a wild donkey’s colt is born a man!

“If you prepare your heart, you will stretch out your hands toward him. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not injustice dwell in your tents. Surely then you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure and will not fear. You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security. You will lie down, and none will make you afraid; many will court your favor. But the eyes of the wicked will fail; all way of escape will be lost to them, and their hope is to breathe their last.”

Job should use the comeback line, “Do you hear yourself Zophar?”

Much of what Zophar says is good, solid wisdom. *But oh, that God would speak and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding. . . . Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?* Zophar is making the legitimate point that no one can understand God’s ways.

But, right in the middle of it he says, “*Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.*”

Gee Zophar, do you really think that no one **except Zophar** can understand God’s ways?

I make this mistake all the time. I often think, “Dude, you need to read your own writings.” It’s not just that I don’t practice what I preach; I don’t even learn what I preach.

We all do this. Memorization is not the same as learning. Even if you memorize something, understand it, and agree with it, that’s still not the same as learning it. There’s something more, something that feels like trust. You don’t really know something until you’ve lived it and experienced its truth.

This is why walking the walk is so essential to following Christ. If you don’t do anything, nothing happens – and you don’t learn.

You’ll “know” things, but you won’t really believe them.

5 Job 12:1-25 (ESV)

Then Job answered and said:

“No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these? I am a laughingstock to my friends; I, who called to God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand.

“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food? Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days.

“With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land. With him are strength and sound wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leads counselors away stripped, and judges he makes fools. He looses the bonds of kings and binds a waistcloth on their hips. He leads priests away stripped and overthrows the mighty. He deprives of speech those who are trusted and takes away the discernment of the elders. He pours contempt on princes and loosens the belt of the strong. He uncovers the deeps out of darkness and brings deep darkness to light. He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away. He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth and makes them wander in a trackless waste. They grope in the dark without light, and he makes them stagger like a drunken man.”

Up to this point Job has been more civil than his friends. They've leveled harsh criticism, while Job has replied calmly. But now He's tired of their nonsense and takes the gloves off.

He starts by mocking them. “No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you.” Then he challenges them to just look around and see how far off their idea of God's justice is. “*The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand. But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?*”

Even fish get this.

Given Job's legendary patience, this change in attitude is a seismic shift. Job's friends showed up to help but managed to get under Job's skin in a way Satan's attacks couldn't.

But note, this isn't a setback; it's an essential step. God will use this to educate Job.

This is one of the clearest examples in the whole Bible of all things working together for good.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What would a revival look like in the 21st century? What role would the internet play?
2. Are you sometimes hesitant to share prayer requests because of the way people respond? What happened to cause this?
3. Have you ever had a prayer request get answered after praying for a very long time? Was the answer special in other ways? What did you learn?
4. When have you, or someone you know, stepped out in faith (sacrificed or taken a risk for Christ)? What special things came from this?
5. Do you ever struggle with believing the promise of Romans 8:28? *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* (ESV)

When times are tough, where do you find comfort?

Items for prayer: