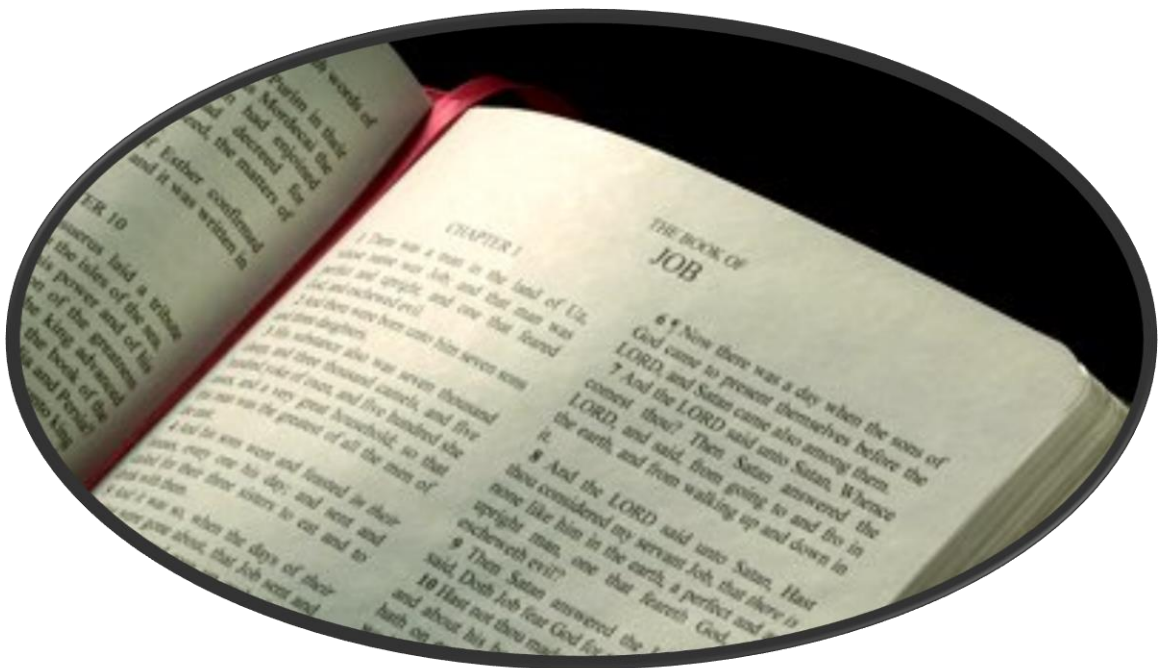


# JOB

## JOB HITS BACK



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Job 13:1-16:17: Job Hits Back*

## *Job 13:1-16:17: Job Hits Back*

Job makes effective counter-arguments. Eliphaz gets nasty.

Job responds by noting that they're not only wrong, they're miserable comforters.

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## 1 Job 13:1-28 (ESV)

*“Behold, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it. What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you. But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God. As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all. Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom! Hear now my argument and listen to the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality toward him? Will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you? Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay.*

*“Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may. Why should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him. Keep listening to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears. Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be in the right. Who is there who will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die. Only grant me two things, then I will not hide myself from your face: withdraw your hand far from me, and let not dread of you terrify me. Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me. How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff? For you write bitter things against me and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks and watch all my paths; you set a limit for the soles of my feet. Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.”*

Now Job really turns up the heat. His friends aren’t just slandering him, they’re slandering God.

*Will you speak falsely for God and speak deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality toward him? Will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you?*

Their error is assuming that God is some kind of omniscient Judge Judy, dispensing human justice perfectly. They expect to see perfect fairness *in this life*. They expect God’s priorities to be the same as our priorities. That’s ridiculous. The suffering of Christians makes no sense from this perspective.

But there’s another, larger lesson in this passage. What Job predicts would happen to his friends, will actually happen to Job.

*Will it be well with you when he searches you out?... Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you?*

Job will make virtually the same errors his friends are making – and God will call him out for it.

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Doctrine matters. Being wrong about God’s actions is being wrong about God. Job’s friends aren’t worshipping who they think they’re worshipping; they’re worshipping a fantasy. This makes communion with God almost impossible, which hinders obedience.

Many modern Christians do this. They worship a God who would never have created this universe. “The brutality of nature couldn’t have been created by a loving God.” You can’t have a relationship with a figment of your imagination.

*Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'* – Matthew 7:23 (NIV)

## 2 Job 14:1-22 (ESV)

*“Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not. And do you open your eyes on such a one and bring me into judgment with you? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one. Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass, look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.*

*For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put out branches like a young plant. But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he? As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come. You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands. For then you would number my steps; you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.*

*“But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place; the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of man. You prevail forever against him, and he passes; you change his countenance, and send him away. His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; they are brought low, and he perceives it not. He feels only the pain of his own body, and he mourns only for himself.”*

This passage points to Christ. *Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. . . . Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? . . . Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come. . . . For then you would number my steps; you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity.* Those who know the LORD always knew the Christ would come.

He had to. There's no other way.

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The whole Old Testament points to Christ. The whole universe points to Christ. There is a Christ because there had to be a Christ. The world was broken and a broken world can't fix itself.

It's not a fluke that the Old Testament is most of the Bible. It's most of the message. Once you establish the inevitability of the Messiah, His showing up is just the climax. Sure, that's the best part, but if you ignore the lead-up you won't understand the ending.

Too many Christians do just that. They think that the message of the Old Testament is, “Be good.” Many pastors preach that message, if they preach on the Old Testament at all.

Ask God to make you hungrier for this part of His word. It's a high calorie diet.

### 3 Job 15:1-16 (ESV)

*Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:*

*“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? Should he argue in unprofitable talk, or in words with which he can do no good? But you are doing away with the fear of God and hindering meditation before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you.*

*“Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father. Are the comforts of God too small for you, or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring such words out of your mouth? What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!”*

What started out as three friends trying to help console Job in his grief has now turned into a full blown fight. Imagine this kind of argument erupting at a funeral. How on earth did this turn so ugly?

The key here is a perfectly sharp disagreement over the facts – specifically whether some sin precipitated Job’s afflictions. Job is absolutely sure that no such sin happened. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are equally certain that one must have.

Certainty makes people hostile. Job’s certainty makes him sure his friends are lousy comforters. Their certainty makes them sure that Job’s lying, and thus that he’s falsely maligning God.

Job is right and they’re wrong but that’s not what’s important. What’s important is that this kind of disagreement isn’t rare. People are often sure they’re right even when they’re wrong.

In this case God Himself is going to show up and set things straight, but usually this kind of disagreement is never resolved. Either the argument leads to the end of a relationship, or everyone just lets the whole thing drop (and simmer).

Normally, there’s only one way to achieve a good ending; someone has to admit they’re wrong, even though they’re still sure they’re right. Neither Job nor his friends do that here.

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Admitting you’re wrong even when you’re sure you’re right falls under the category of forgiveness – something Christians are commanded to do. Yeah it’s hard, but hey, it’s not martyrdom.

Besides, do this a lot and when you get to heaven you’ll discover that you were right half the time.

4 Job 15:17-35 (NKJV)

*“I will tell you, hear me; What I have seen I will declare, What wise men have told, Not hiding anything received from their fathers, To whom alone the land was given, And no alien passed among them: The wicked man writhes with pain all his days, And the number of years is hidden from the oppressor. Dreadful sounds are in his ears; In prosperity the destroyer comes upon him. He does not believe that he will return from darkness, For a sword is waiting for him. He wanders about for bread, saying, ‘Where is it?’ He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand. Trouble and anguish make him afraid; They overpower him, like a king ready for battle. For he stretches out his hand against God, And acts defiantly against the Almighty, Running stubbornly against Him with his strong, embossed shield.*

*“Though he has covered his face with his fatness, And made his waist heavy with fat, He dwells in desolate cities, In houses which no one inhabits, Which are destined to become ruins. He will not be rich, Nor will his wealth continue, Nor will his possessions overspread the earth. He will not depart from darkness; The flame will dry out his branches, And by the breath of His mouth he will go away. Let him not trust in futile things, deceiving himself, For futility will be his reward. It will be accomplished before his time, And his branch will not be green. He will shake off his unripe grape like a vine, And cast off his blossom like an olive tree. For the company of hypocrites will be barren, And fire will consume the tents of bribery. They conceive trouble and bring forth futility; Their womb prepares deceit.”*

Eliphaz is firmly committed to a theology of just desserts. *The wicked man writhes with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden from the oppressor. Dreadful sounds are in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer comes upon him. ... Trouble and anguish make him afraid; they overpower him, like a king ready for battle. ... He will not be rich, Nor will his wealth continue, Nor will his possessions overspread the earth.*

If the experience of the wicked was anything like that, they’d mend their ways in a minute. That’s obviously not how it works. For reasons God only knows, wicked people often enjoy their wickedness (in this life, anyway). Conversely, many of the greatest saints in history were tortured or even martyred.

Eliphaz is so devoted to his theology of just desserts that he doesn’t even notice all the things around him that contradict it. As Yogi Berra said, “You can observe a lot by just watching.”

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Eliphaz isn’t all that different from you and me. Everyone sees the world through the lens of their assumptions. This is fundamental; it’s the underlying mechanism for all optical illusions. Your brain converts what you see into what you think you should see before you even see it. Eliphaz sees what he thinks should be true. Yogi would have told him, “You need to look with your eyes.”

The great treasures of the Bible are hidden in plain sight. My trick for discovering the golden nuggets is to read a passage over and over until I **don’t** understand it. The first three or four times, I don’t notice what it says.

Then it hits me – and the digging starts.

5 Job 16:1-17 (NKJV)

*Then Job answered and said:*

*“I have heard many such things; Miserable comforters are you all! Shall words of wind have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer? I also could speak as you do, If your soul were in my soul’s place. I could heap up words against you, And shake my head at you; But I would strengthen you with my mouth, And the comfort of my lips would relieve your grief.*

*“Though I speak, my grief is not relieved; And if I remain silent, how am I eased? But now He has worn me out; You have made desolate all my company. You have shriveled me up, And it is a witness against me; My leanness rises up against me And bears witness to my face. He tears me in His wrath, and hates me; He gnashes at me with His teeth; My adversary sharpens His gaze on me. They gape at me with their mouth, They strike me reproachfully on the cheek, They gather together against me. God has delivered me to the ungodly, And turned me over to the hands of the wicked. I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He also has taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target, His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity; He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound; He runs at me like a warrior.*

*“I have sewn sackcloth over my skin, And laid my head in the dust. My face is flushed from weeping, And on my eyelids is the shadow of death; Although no violence is in my hands, And my prayer is pure.”*

Job gets back to his original theme – his immense suffering. He makes two simple points:

- 1) They aren’t comforting him.
- 2) Nothing he can do will be comforting either.

This trumps everything they’ve said. Lest they forget, they came here to comfort Job. Even if they were right on their theological points, they should have stuck a cork in it.

Job also notes that his friends are not comforting him the way he would have comforted them if their roles were reversed. If they’d just stop for a minute and reflect on what they’re doing, they’d realize how inappropriate their actions are.

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We do something similar with sharing the gospel. As important as the gospel is, not every situation is the right time to bring it up. When people are suffering, the right thing to do is address their suffering.

The gospel somehow manages to bring itself up. Don’t push it; let God run the show.

Salvation is always a major miracle – the supernatural transformation of a heart. So, with the Holy Spirit clearly involved, you can count on minor miracles to set the stage.

You are part of a team and you’re not the team leader. Relax; the team leader is awesome.

Let the leader show His stuff.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Studying God and studying doctrine are important, but being close to God is more so. What do you do to get closer to God?
2. What parts of the Old Testament do you like the most? What parts do you have to push yourself to get through?
3. Have you ever apologized when you knew you didn't do anything wrong? How did that turn out?
4. As you've grown in Christ, how have your perceptions changed?
5. How do you let the Holy Spirit to lead you when sharing the gospel? What do you look for?

*Items for prayer:*