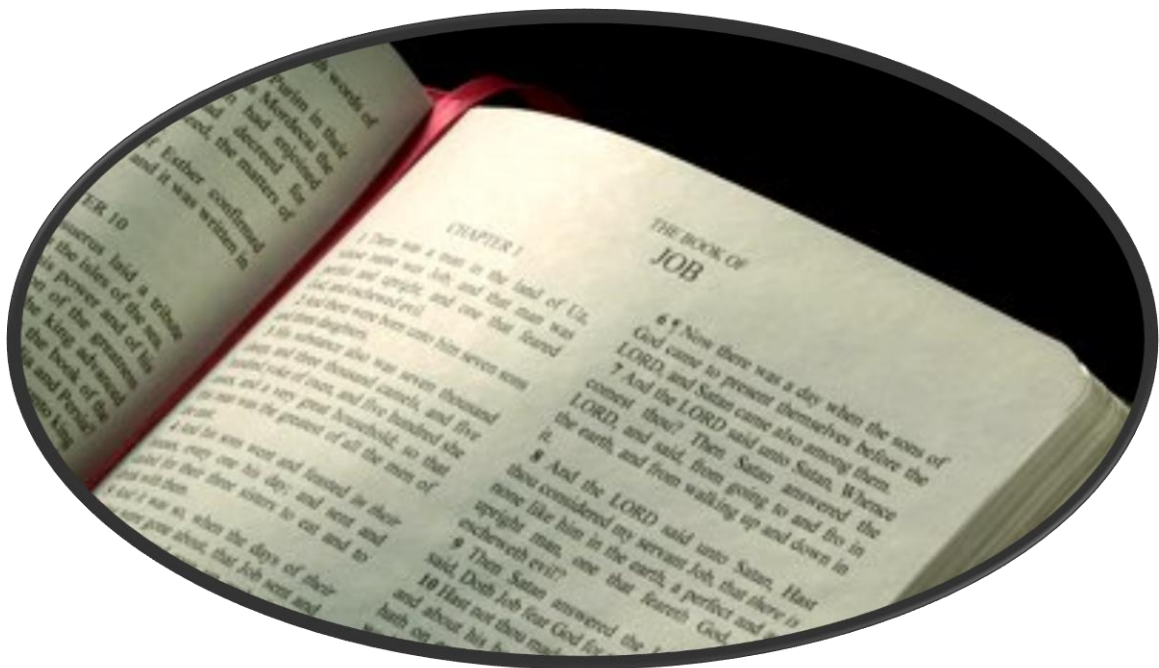


# JOB

## WHERE IS JUSTICE?



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Job 16:18-21:26: Where is Justice?*

## *Job 16:18-21:26: Where is Justice?*

Job makes effective counter-arguments. He also makes an astounding prophesy, “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*”

Still, he’s starting to buy in to his friend’s assumptions and this leads him to say things like, “*As for me, is my complaint against man? Why should I not be impatient?*”

While technically winning the argument, he’s slipping into a sinful attitude.

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Thank you.

Job 16:18-21:26: Where is Justice?

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1 Job 16:18-17:16 (NIV)

*“Earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend.*

*“Only a few years will pass before I take the path of no return. My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me. Surely mockers surround me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility.*

*“Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me? You have closed their minds to understanding; therefore you will not let them triumph. If anyone denounces their friends for reward, the eyes of their children will fail.*

*“God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit. My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow. The upright are appalled at this; the innocent are aroused against the ungodly. Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.*

*“But come on, all of you, try again! I will not find a wise man among you. My days have passed, my plans are shattered. Yet the desires of my heart turn night into day; in the face of the darkness light is near. If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in the realm of darkness, if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister,’ where then is my hope—who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?”*

Job’s manner of speaking here is confusing because he switches back and forth between talking directly to God and speaking of God in the third person. He’s obviously talking to God when he says, *“Give me, O God, the pledge you demand.”* But when he says, *“God has made me a byword to everyone,”* Job must be addressing others.

But get past this confusion and you’ll see a sea change in Job’s tone. In the third paragraph, Job is asking God to help him out, not by relieving his pain, but by vindicating him. He’s even telling God that he knows He will do it. *You have closed their minds to understanding; therefore you will not let them triumph.*

This is the beginning of the hubris that will eventually get Job called on the carpet. If the message of the book of Job can be condensed down to one simple sentence, it might be, “Everything God does is above our pay grade.”

Job seemed to understand this earlier, but now he’s wandered away from that concept. He thinks his own vindication is important.

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It’s almost impossible for a human to outgrow that kind of self-centered perspective – but that’s the goal of every Christian.

Remember, we’re supposed to be prepared for martyrdom for His glory, not ours.

## 2 Job 18:1-21 (ESV)

*Then Bildad the Shubite answered and said:*

*“How long will you hunt for words? Consider, and then we will speak. Why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight? You who tear yourself in your anger, shall the earth be forsaken for you, or the rock be removed out of its place?”*

*“Indeed, the light of the wicked is put out, and the flame of his fire does not shine. The light is dark in his tent, and his lamp above him is put out. His strong steps are shortened, and his own schemes throw him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks on its mesh. A trap seizes him by the heel; a snare lays hold of him. A rope is hidden for him in the ground, a trap for him in the path. Terrors frighten him on every side, and chase him at his heels. His strength is famished, and calamity is ready for his stumbling. It consumes the parts of his skin; the firstborn of death consumes his limbs. He is torn from the tent in which he trusted and is brought to the king of terrors. In his tent dwells that which is none of his; sulfur is scattered over his habitation. His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above. His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street. He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live. They of the west are appalled at his day, and horror seizes them of the east. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous, such is the place of him who knows not God.”*

Bildad is taking Job’s comments personally. *Why are we counted as cattle? Why are we stupid in your sight?* This conversation is getting steadily worse, in a predictable way. Many people have trouble admitting they’re wrong. For them, a disagreement feels like an attack.

I wish schools made everyone learn computer programming. The great and terrible thing about programming is that even the tiniest mistake causes the program to fail. You have to find and fix all the bugs before the dang thing runs right. So, after making countless mistakes, and spending hours finding and fixing them, you learn that mistakes aren’t anything special.

But the best part is that nothing finds bugs faster than a second pair of eyes. So you also learn to appreciate someone else pointing out your mistakes. When someone has just helped you avoid hours of tearing your hair out trying to figure out what you did wrong, you’re bound to be thankful, instead of resentful. Oh, if only Bildad had taken programming in school!

Bildad is wrong. It shouldn’t be a big deal, but he can’t handle having his errors pointed out.

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One of the beautiful things about the gospel is that it slams our egos. We learn to treasure God’s grace instead of our own goodness. Since we admit that we’re sinful, there’s nothing to get defensive about.

Though we know this doctrine, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us take it to heart.

### 3 Job 19:1-29 (ESV)

*Then Job answered and said:*

*“How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me? And even if it be true that I have erred, my error remains with myself. If indeed you magnify yourselves against me and make my disgrace an argument against me, know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me. Behold, I cry out, ‘Violence!’ but I am not answered; I call for help, but there is no justice. He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths. He has stripped from me my glory and taken the crown from my head. He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone, and my hope has been pulled up like a tree. He has kindled his wrath against me and counts me as his adversary. His troops come on together; they have cast up their siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent.*

*“He has put my brothers far from me, and those who knew me are wholly estranged from me. My relatives have failed me, my close friends have forgotten me. The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become a foreigner in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy. My breath is strange to my wife, and I am a stench to the children of my own mother. Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?*

*“Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! If you say, ‘How we will pursue him!’ and, ‘The root of the matter is found in him,’ be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment.”*

That last paragraph is a treasure. Job wishes that his words be written in a book and here we are, thousands of years later, reading that book. So, did he ever ask that his sores be taken away?

No. Instead, in the midst of his anguish, Job blurts out an amazing prophesy – “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*”

Job’s righteousness comes from his perspective. His agenda is from another world.

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Christians are supposed to have an “other world” agenda too. But we often make a mistake when teaching this; we stress doing it to attract unbelievers.

But that’s not the goal. The goal is to have the other world agenda. If you think about who will notice, you ruin the whole thing. That switches your focus back to this world.

The Pharisees cared about who was watching them.

Avoid that like the plague.

#### 4 Job 20:1-29 (ESV)

*Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:*

*“Therefore my thoughts answer me, because of my haste within me. I hear censure that insults me, and out of my understanding a spirit answers me. Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment? Though his height mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds, he will perish forever like his own dung; those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’ He will fly away like a dream and not be found; he will be chased away like a vision of the night. The eye that saw him will see him no more, nor will his place any more behold him. His children will seek the favor of the poor, and his hands will give back his wealth. His bones are full of his youthful vigor, but it will lie down with him in the dust.*

*“Though evil is sweet in his mouth, though he hides it under his tongue, though he is loath to let it go and holds it in his mouth, yet his food is turned in his stomach; it is the venom of cobras within him. He swallows down riches and vomits them up again; God casts them out of his belly. He will suck the poison of cobras; the tongue of a viper will kill him. He will not look upon the rivers, the streams flowing with honey and curds. He will give back the fruit of his toil and will not swallow it down; from the profit of his trading he will get no enjoyment. For he has crushed and abandoned the poor; he has seized a house that he did not build.*

*“Because he knew no contentment in his belly, he will not let anything in which he delights escape him. There was nothing left after he had eaten; therefore his prosperity will not endure. In the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in distress; the hand of everyone in misery will come against him. To fill his belly to the full, God will send his burning anger against him and rain it upon him into his body. He will flee from an iron weapon; a bronze arrow will strike him through. It is drawn forth and comes out of his body; the glittering point comes out of his gallbladder; terrors come upon him. Utter darkness is laid up for his treasures; a fire not fanned will devour him; what is left in his tent will be consumed. The heavens will reveal his iniquity, and the earth will rise up against him. The possessions of his house will be carried away, dragged off in the day of God’s wrath. This is the wicked man’s portion from God, the heritage decreed for him by God.”*

Zophar isn’t wrong here; he just misunderstands the time scale. He says, “*Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth, that the exulting of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment?*” Yes, but an entire lifetime is *but for a moment* to God.

*For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.* – Psalm 90:4

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Part of our other world agenda is seeing things from God’s perspective. That’s a daunting task, but we should always try. Scripture does make a few things clear. God’s time scales are not our time scales. The same thing holds for space. His goodness, mercy and love dwarf ours too but who can comprehend those things?

Still, it’s encouraging (and humbling) to ponder these truths.

5 Job 21:1-26 (ESV)

*Then Job answered and said:*

*“Keep listening to my words, and let this be your comfort. Bear with me, and I will speak, and after I have spoken, mock on. As for me, is my complaint against man? Why should I not be impatient? Look at me and be appalled, and lay your hand over your mouth. When I remember, I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh. Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and does not miscarry. They send out their little boys like a flock, and their children dance. They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol. They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?’ Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand? The counsel of the wicked is far from me.*

*“How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out? That their calamity comes upon them? That God distributes pains in his anger? That they are like straw before the wind, and like chaff that the storm carries away? You say, ‘God stores up their iniquity for their children.’ Let him pay it out to them, that they may know it. Let their own eyes see their destruction, and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what do they care for their houses after them, when the number of their months is cut off? Will any teach God knowledge, seeing that he judges those who are on high? One dies in his full vigor, being wholly at ease and secure, his pails full of milk and the marrow of his bones moist. Another dies in bitterness of soul, never having tasted of prosperity. They lie down alike in the dust, and the worms cover them.”*

Job and his friends can’t argue about what they’d like to argue about, so they hit the next best thing. The issue is whether God could allow a righteous man to suffer as Job has. They can’t argue that; there aren’t other cases like Job’s. So they argue whether God would allow a non-righteous man to not suffer.

Do God’s blessings (in this life) always match what people deserve? By claiming that they do, Job’s friends have painted themselves into a corner.

If just some of the unrighteous have good lives, their thesis is disproved. Job makes that case easily.

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All this back and forth between Job and his friends serves to hammer home an important point – not every turn of events is a sign from God. His higher purposes can make almost anything happen. Not every catastrophe is a punishment – not every blessing a reward.

Still, the “theology of just desserts” is so popular that it’s just assumed. In *“The Sound of Music,”* when Maria and Captain Von Trapp realize that they’re deliriously in love, Maria wonders aloud, “How can this be happening to me?” Then she sings, “Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good.” She knows that God has just granted her heart’s desire, but she can’t figure out where in her “wicked, miserable past” she did something to deserve it – though it must be somewhere.

The idea that this is a gift hasn’t even crossed her mind. She can’t imagine that God just forgave her.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Have you ever been falsely accused? How did you handle it?
2. When is it easiest to admit you're wrong? When is it hardest?
3. How do you balance being responsible (the world's agenda) with God's agenda? How are these two agendas similar? How are they different? Do they ever seriously conflict?
4. What illustrations, explanations, or analogies do you use to try to comprehend God's infinite nature?
5. Have you ever sensed that God was punishing you for something you did? How can you tell?

*Items for prayer:*