Book of Job

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANONYMOUS ANONYMOUS

The unknown author is deeply conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures, making him very likely an Israelite. The illustrations and analogies he uses suggest that he was a well-traveled individual and a keen observer of nature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Book of Job doesn't contain any historical allusions to help readers know precisely when and where it was written. Over the centuries, scholars have offered a variety of opinions on this. The Babylonian Talmud (a compendium of Jewish law and biblical commentary) speculates that Job's author could have lived anytime from the age of the earliest biblical patriarchs (c. 2000 B.C.E.) to the time of the Jewish exiles' return from captivity in Babylon (after 538 B.C.E.). The Book of Ezekiel references Job, naming Job, along with Bible heroes Noah and Daniel, as one of three paragons of "righteousness." So if Ezekiel knew Job's story from reading the Book of Job (as opposed to hearing it through other written or oral traditions), that would date the book *before* the Babylonian exile. Also, though modern scholars have questioned whether Job was a real, historical person, citations in Ezekiel (and also in the New Testament's Book of James) suggest that ancient authors took his existence for granted. Overall, however, the history is simply inconclusive. In fact, the book has a deliberately timeless and even trans-national perspective, in that the protagonist isn't described as an Israelite, and with a couple of exceptions, the Hebrew name for God (Yahweh) isn't used. In the book's later history of Christian interpretation, the "Redeemer" Job names in Chapter 19 has been identified with Jesus Christ, and Job's hope of vindication by his Redeemer has been read as an early hint of the later doctrine of bodily resurrection after death.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Book of Job is part of the section of the Hebrew Bible (or *Tanakh*) known as the *Ketuvim*, or "Writings." It has much in common with other biblical wisdom literature, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, in its inquiries about life's meaning and its use of proverbial sayings. There is another ancient text called "The Babylonian Theodicy" in which an unnamed sufferer and his friend dialogue in a cycle of 27 speeches, although unlike in Job, the deity doesn't appear to provide resolution. Job can be classified as a "problem play," or a play in which a problem is posed and characters interact with it. Other examples of this genre include Euripides's *Alcestis* (which explores problems of fate and mortality), Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, and Henrik Ibsen's plays like *A Doll's House* (women's rights) and *An Enemy of the People* (issues surrounding truth-telling and public opinion). Job's trials helped inspire Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye the Dairyman" short stories. Though focused on the character of Samson from the Book of Judges, elements of Job's character feature in John Milton's dramatic poem *Samson Agonistes*. The book influences the character Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* (and Dostoyevsky himself cites the book's strong influence on him from childhood onward).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Book of Job
- **When Written:** Most modern scholars estimate that Job was written around the 6th century B.C.E. (the 500s B.C.E.).
- **Literary Period:** Ancient Near Eastern
- **Genre:** Religious Literature, Hebrew Poetry, Poetic Drama.
- **Setting:** The land of Uz, to Israel's south and east (possibly on the Arabian peninsula).
- **Climax:** God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind.
- **Antagonist:** Satan; Job's so-called friends; at times, God.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Unstaged. Job could technically be classified as a "closet drama," a drama that contains elements like dialogue and monologue but was not intended to be staged as a play. Closet dramas tend to be written in poetic form and to contain very long speeches that wouldn't really work on the stage.

Blake's Biblical Art. In 1826, William Blake published a successful book, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, containing 22 engraved prints he made depicting the events in the biblical story.

PLOT SUMMARY

A "blameless and upright" man named Job lives in the land of Uz with his large, wealthy household, including many children, servants, and livestock. Job has always worshiped God and resisted evil. He even regularly offers sacrifices to God on his family's behalf.

One day in heaven, God and Satan have a conversation. God asks Satan if he's ever considered God's "servant Job," who is so

righteous that he's unlike anyone else on earth. Satan argues that if God allowed Satan to harm what belongs to Job, then Job would actually curse God. So God grants Satan power to touch Job's possessions, as long as he doesn't hurt Job directly.

One day, Job suddenly receives terrible news from one messenger after another. The first three messengers report that, in a series of disasters, Job's livestock have been stolen and his servants have been killed. Worse, the final messenger tells Job that Job's eldest son's house collapsed while all 10 of Job's children were feasting there; all have been crushed to death. At this news, Job tears his robe, shaves his head, and bows to the ground, praising God's name and refusing to accuse him of wrongdoing.

The next time Satan visits the heavenly assembly, God points out that despite what Satan has done, Job remains righteous. Satan retorts that if he's allowed to harm Job's own body, then Job will definitely curse God. God allows this, and Satan then afflicts Job with terrible sores. As Job scrapes at his sores, his wife suggests it would be better to just "Curse God, and die." But Job refuses. Soon after, three of Job's friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—come to visit. When they see Job's suffering, they weep, and they spend seven days grieving with him in silence.

After the seven days are up, Job finally speaks (and the book's prose opening gives way to poetic dialogue), cursing the day he was born and wishing he were resting peacefully in the grave. Then Eliphaz claims that God doesn't afflict innocent people this way and that no human being is sinless (implying that no matter what he says to the contrary, Job isn't suffering innocently). He advises Job that God doesn't wound people without healing them, so Job should patiently trust God. In response, Job accuses Eliphaz and his friends of being cruel and wishes that God would kill him rather than continue to torment him this way.

Next Bildad speaks, insisting that God never does anything unjust and that he always vindicates the blameless in due time. While Job doesn't disagree, he sees no point in questioning or arguing with God; after all, God isn't a human being who could be taken to court. Further, it distresses Job that by afflicting him, God gives the appearance of siding with the wicked.

Zophar addresses Job next, calling Job's words "babble" and pointing out that God's wisdom is limitless, so Job shouldn't claim to grasp it. He assures Job that if he directs his heart toward God and turns from wickedness, he won't be miserable anymore.

Job responds to Zophar with sarcasm, saying that Zophar is clearly the only wise person alive. Job laments that people used to look up to him for his insight, but now he's just a laughingstock. Nevertheless, there's nothing new that Zophar—or any of Job's friends— can teach him. It's *God* Job wants to argue with. In fact, he'll defend himself before God even if God kills him for it. He prays, begging God to stop oppressing him, even to look away from human beings, whose lives are so brief, so that they can enjoy what little time they have on earth. Eliphaz responds by claiming that Job's own words condemn him and that, once again, Job is only suffering the rightful consequences of defying God.

Job calls his friends "miserable comforters" and, in view of the fact that God seems to have abandoned him, he calls for a heavenly witness to vouch for him. When Bildad objects that the ungodly never thrive, Job is undeterred, maintaining that God is pursuing him without just cause and that everyone who loved him has now abandoned him.

And yet, Job believes that his "Redeemer lives," and that someday—even after Job's body has decayed—he will see his Redeemer on the earth.

But Zophar, agitated, insists it's always been true that wicked people live unhappy lives devoid of God's blessing. Job tells Zophar to stop mocking him and counters that, in fact, the wicked prosper, live fearlessly, and die in peace.

When Eliphaz speaks up next, he continues to argue that Job has done wrong—he's even been cruel to the needy—and that's why his life is filled with terrors. He accuses Job of being like those who assume that God is too far away to see the awful things they're doing. If Job wants God to answer his prayers, then he must repent.

Job responds that he wishes he could go to God's house and plead his case in person; then God would hear Job's arguments and acquit him. The trouble is, no matter where he goes, he can't find God. But Job knows that God knows where *he* is, and that, furthermore, he will emerge from God's testing "like **gold**" since he hasn't abandoned God's commandments.

Bildad interjects that nothing and nobody is pure or righteous in God's sight, but Job sarcastically cuts off his "helpful" friend. Job goes on to describe God's mighty power over the natural world and his wisdom, which is far beyond human discovery. He wishes he were still in his prime, back in the days when young and old alike respected Job and sought his counsel. Now, he's in constant pain, mocked by everyone, and seemingly abandoned by God. He insists that if he has done anything wrong, then he deserves God's judgment (implying once again that he's innocent). Then he stops speaking, and his three companions do the same.

Then, a fourth companion speaks up—Elihu. Elihu is angry about Job's self-justification and the three friends' failure to answer Job. Elihu acknowledges that he is young, but that he's been listening to the others for a long time and can no longer contain himself—he *must* speak. Elihu insists that because God is so much greater than mortals, it isn't right to argue with him. He claims that God often speaks to people through bodily suffering in order to draw their souls away from Sheol. He charges that Job is behaving rebelliously, like a wicked person,

when he maintains his innocence. He urges Job to observe God's mighty works in nature and explain them to his friends if he can (which will prove that Job is no wiser than the rest of them).

Suddenly, God himself speaks to Job "out of the **whirlwind**." God demands to know who dares question him and says that Job must answer *his* questions. God then interrogates Job, asking him a long series of questions about the making of the earth and its creatures. He even mocks Job, saying that surely Job must know all these things. At last, Job admits that he is small and declares that he will no longer speak.

But God isn't done speaking. He tells Job to consider fearsome creatures like Behemoth and Leviathan that God created and that God alone can tame. In response, Job confesses that he's spoken foolishly about things far too wonderful for him to understand; he humbly repents.

Afterward, God admonishes Eliphaz for not speaking about him in the right way. He orders Eliphaz to make a sacrifice and ask God's servant Job to pray for Eliphaz and the others. When Eliphaz does this, God accepts Job's intercession on his friends' behalf. Not only that, but God also restores Job's fortunes, making him even more prosperous and blessed than he was before his suffering and granting him 10 more children. Job lives for 140 more years and dies "old and full of days," having seen several generations of his descendants.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Job – The book's central character, Job, is a wealthy man who lives in the eastern land of Uz with his wife and 10 children, many servants, and huge livestock herds. He has a reputation for being "blameless and upright" in his conduct, and he faithfully worships God—God himself calls Job his own servant. Before Satan suggests the possibility of tempting Job to curse God, God places a protective "fence" around Job so that no harm will come to him. After Satan causes Job's possessions to be stolen and his children and servants to be killed, Job shows his faith in God by immediately worshiping God and praising God's name, refusing to accuse him of doing anything wrong. However, seeing that Job doesn't curse God, Satan next afflicts him with terrible sores. After rejecting his wife's suggestion that he simply "Curse God, and die," Job grieves in silence for a week with his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But then he finally speaks, cursing the day he was born and wishing he were dead rather than continuing to suffer under God's affliction. When his friends argue with him, contending that God doesn't cause the innocent to suffer (thereby suggesting that Job has misdeeds to answer for), Job accuses them of being unkind and "worthless physicians" whose so-called comfort only prolongs Job's suffering. It's demonstrably untrue, Job maintains, that the wicked suffer and the innocent prosper; he has witnessed the opposite situation. Throughout the debate, Job unwaveringly maintains his innocence before God, and after several rounds of debate, his three companions ultimately give up trying to change his mind. When God speaks to Job directly at the end of the book, Job doesn't dare argue further and finally repents "in dust and ashes" for speaking about things far beyond his understanding. Finally, God restores Job's fortunes, blessing and enriching him twice as much as before. Job ends up with more livestock than ever, and he also fathers 10 more children, including daughters Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-happuch. He lives for 140 more years and dies "full of days," having seen four generations of offspring.

God – Throughout the book, God is sometimes referred to as "the LORD" or "the Almighty." The Israelites' omnipotent deity, God has power and control over Satan—for instance, Satan can only cause harm when and where God permits it. Before Satan proposes tempting Job, God keeps a "fence" around Job to protect him, and it's only with God's permission that Satan can do Job any harm. To Job, God is a mysterious, even oppressive presence who, though all-powerful and present everywhere, seems to "hide his face," making Job suffer for no clear reason. These characteristics make Job wish that he could speak to God face to face to plead his case, and yet, at the same time, he wishes that he could hide from God. God himself is silent through most of the book. After Job's friends and Elihu have finished speaking, God addresses Job overwhelmingly from "out of the **whirlwind**." He interrogates Job, naming various mysteries of creation and commanding Job to explain them, if Job is so wise. He also condemns the folly of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but he pardons the men after Job prays on their behalf. At the end of the book, God restores Job's fortunes, giving him twice as much as he had before. In the end, God doesn't specifically answer Job's questions about the purpose of his suffering, but Job humbly submits to God's unknowable wisdom and majesty—the book's overarching emphasis.

Satan – Satan is a spiritual being who has the ability to affect human lives, often for harm, though he is ultimately subservient to God. Though the book is vague as to Satan's precise nature and role, Satan is portrayed as being at liberty to wander the earth and even visit the divine assembly or heaven, where he talks with God. Though Satan has the power to harm people, he only holds this power because God grants it to him, and he cannot do what God forbids—for example, at the beginning of the book, God allows Satan to harm anything that belongs to Job, as long as Satan doesn't harm Job's own body. At that point, Satan causes Job's servants to be killed and his animals stolen by raiding parties, and finally, all Job's children are killed in a house collapse. When these disasters don't lead Job to curse God (as Satan expects), Satan is allowed to afflict Job himself, which he does by giving Job tormenting sores. After all this, Satan doesn't appear in the story again. In fact, throughout

the book, Job's quarrel over his suffering is clearly with God and not with Satan.

Eliphaz the Temanite – Eliphaz is Job's friend who, with Bildad and Zophar, visits Job with the alleged intention of comforting him in his suffering. The book gives no further details about Eliphaz, and the three companions don't have very distinct personalities (or arguments, for that matter). At first, the friends commiserate with Job in silence, but after Job begins to lament his pain and to argue that he suffers unjustly, Eliphaz and the others begin to argue with Job in return. Eliphaz's argument boils down to the belief that God doesn't afflict innocent people and that if Job is suffering, it's because he has committed wicked deeds and therefore *deserves* suffering. Therefore, he says, Job should be grateful for God's discipline and patiently accept his suffering while waiting for God to relieve it; Job shouldn't keep foolishly arguing with God that he's really innocent. At the end of the book, God condemns Eliphaz's and his friends' foolish speech, saying they haven't spoken rightly about him, but he forgives them when Job prays on their behalf.

Bildad the Shuhite – Bildad is Job's friend who, with Eliphaz and Zophar, visits Job with the alleged intention of comforting him in his suffering. The book gives no further details about Bildad, and the three companions don't have very distinct personalities (or arguments, for that matter). At first, the friends commiserate with Job in silence, but after Job begins to lament his pain and to argue that he suffers unjustly, Bildad and the others begin to argue with Job in return. Basically, Bildad says, wisdom teaches that God does not punish the righteous, and if Job is truly innocent, then God will restore his fortunes. Like the other two, Bildad applies wisdom to Job's situation in a simplistic way that Job rejects as useless.

Zophar the Naamathite – Zophar is Job's friend who, with Eliphaz and Bildad, visits Job with the alleged intention of comforting him in his suffering. The book gives no further details about Zophar, and the three companions don't have very distinct personalities (or arguments, for that matter). At first, the friends commiserate with Job in silence, but after Job begins to lament his pain and to argue that he suffers unjustly, Zophar and the others begin to argue with Job in return. Like the others, Zophar argues that God only afflicts the wicked with miserable lives and condemns Job's "babble" in contending otherwise.

Elihu – Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, mysteriously appears after Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar quit arguing with Job. Elihu is angry—both at Job for insisting upon his own righteousness, and at Job's three friends for failing to answer him adequately. He says that until now, he's refrained from speaking up out of respect for the older men in the group, but after listening to everyone else, he can no longer contain himself. Elihu argues that God afflicts people in order to bring them back from the brink of Sheol. In some ways, his arguments are similar to the three friends' arguments, in that he claims that God always repays people according to their deeds and therefore it isn't right for evildoers to claim they're righteous in God's sight; that, indeed, it's arrogant for anyone to defend themselves before him. In another way, Elihu shifts the debate somewhat, focusing less on human righteousness or wickedness and more on God's mighty works and unsearchable greatness (setting the stage for God himself to speak after Elihu says his piece).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Job's Wife – Job's wife isn't named and appears little in the book. After Satan afflicts Job, Job's wife suggests that it would be better if Job just cursed God and died, but he rejects this suggestion.

Jemimah – Jemimah is one of the daughters born to Job after God restores his fortunes.

Keziah – Keziah is one of the daughters born to Job after God restores his fortunes.

Keren-happuch – Keren-happuch is one of the daughters born to Job after God restores his fortunes.

TERMS

Behemoth – Behemoth is a great primeval creature whose identity isn't clear from the poetic description, though Bible scholars have often identified it with the hippopotamus. When **God** questions **Job**, God names Behemoth as an example of one of his great creations. Behemoth is described as a powerful, grass-eating, river-dwelling animal that only God can tame.

Leviathan – Leviathan is a great primeval creature whose identity isn't clear from the poetic description, though Bible scholars have speculated that it's a crocodile or a mythic sea monster. When **God** questions **Job**, God names Leviathan as an example of one of his great creations. Leviathan is described as having an armored coat, sharp teeth, and fiery breath. Though no weapon can pierce this fearsome creature, God can tame it and even play with it like a pet.

Sheol – Sheol is the dwelling-place of the dead in the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament). In the Book of Job, it's portrayed as a place from which the dead never return, as deep as heaven is high. At the same time, it isn't the same as the later biblical concept of hell, and it isn't just for the wicked. In his complaints, **Job** even says he'd prefer to hide in Sheol than continue to suffer affliction from **God**.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes

occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SUFFERING AND DIVINE JUSTICE

The Bible's Book of Job explores the question of why good people sometimes endure senseless suffering—particularly, why God seems to *allow* such suffering. The story centers on Job, a thriving patriarch whose prosperity seems to be the reward for his upstanding behavior. So when God permits Satan to inflict disease and devastating losses on Job, it seems, from a human perspective, that divine justice has somehow gone awry. As he laments his circumstances, Job notes that it often seems like God refrains from punishing those who *do* deserve it and ignores the cries of the innocent. Meanwhile, Job's companions (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu) argue that God *doesn't* make righteous people suffer, so Job must be guilty of sin despite his protestations of innocence. After a series of arguments between the men, God interjects with his own perspective, speaking of his overpowering greatness and majesty, and pointing out how little human beings understand about the world, much less about God. Through the ambiguity surrounding God's response to Job's innocent suffering, the book suggests that suffering is a mystery, and that its larger purpose (whether a person "deserves" suffering or not) is to draw people closer to God in humble dependence.

Job's suffering initially appears to be meaningless because he hasn't done anything to "deserve" it. From the beginning, the book establishes that Job is "blameless and upright"—he worships God and resists evil. He even offers sacrifices to God to atone for his children's hypothetical sins. Job, then, is a model of goodness—the kind of person who doesn't seem to deserve suffering and, in fact, appears to deserve blessings. So when raiders carry off most of Job's livestock and his children are suddenly killed, the disaster is meant to come as a shock—it's not what such a righteous person would expect, and it sets up a glaring dissonance between the ideal of divine justice and the reality of what actually happens in the world.

Job can't reconcile his own suffering with his belief that God is fundamentally just. It doesn't make sense for God to lump him in with evildoers by handing him over to suffering and shame: Job is innocent, but God is treating him unfairly—something a just God wouldn't do. Furthermore, Job wonders why God, who created him, now threatens him with death, implying that it's unjust for God to have bothered giving Job life in the first place if he was ultimately going to crush Job without reason. This complaint has an ethical undertone—that if it's God's nature to be the giver of life, then it's out of character for him to impose meaningless death, and therefore there must be some explanation for what Job is going through. Countering his friends' (and conventional wisdom's) argument that the wicked generally get what they deserve, Job observes that, in many cases, the wicked actually enjoy long lives, are blessed with children, and die peacefully. This, too, seems to be out of accord with divine justice. Job closes his series of speeches by saying that if he *has* done anything wicked, especially treated the poor unjustly, then it would be only right for him to suffer ruin himself. By concluding this way, Job essentially asks God to act in keeping with divine justice.

Yet, when God himself finally speaks, he doesn't resolve the question of divine justice. Instead, God suggests that Job and his friends have been focused on the wrong thing by wondering *why* some good people suffer—the reason for suffering is a mystery beyond human comprehension, and God's overwhelming greatness underscores this fact. God doesn't give Job and his friends a clear answer to the problems they've been debating all along. Instead, he offers poetry on the complex mysteries of creation, testifying to his own irresistible power and thereby suggesting that everything is within his divine control. Thus the book's answer to the question of suffering is ambiguous—but the ambiguity hints that people should stop focusing on unexplainable circumstances they can't control and instead trust God, who controls everything.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

During his suffering, Job feels that God is both too distant to reach and much too close for comfort. His sufferings make him feel like God is relentlessly oppressing him—looming so close that Job begs God to look away from him long enough to let Job breathe. And yet, at the same time, God seems to "hide his face" from Job (to feel totally absent) and to elude Job's searching, preventing Job from pleading his innocence to God. When, near the end of the book, God finally speaks, he thunders "out of the **whirlwind**," asking Job if he understands the kinds of things God knows—like how the earth was made—or can do the kinds of things God does, like create fearsome creatures or send thunder and lightning on the earth. God's questions suggest that he is both intimately close to his creation and unimaginably far beyond it. Through God's scathing interrogation of Job, the book implies that rather than trying to grasp the mystery of God (arrogantly seeking to put themselves on the same plane as God), people should humbly submit to God and worship him instead.

While suffering, Job thinks God seems both too close and too far away. In the midst of his suffering, Job laments that God doesn't seem to leave him alone—in fact, as God oppresses Job daily, it's like God won't look away long enough to let Job "swallow [his] spittle," an image of a relentlessly looming, intimidating presence. Even as Job begs God to "withdraw his hand" and stop frightening him, he also accuses God of hiding his face and refusing to reply to Job's questions. God only seems to reveal himself to Job in terrifying ways, and he remains aloof from Job's pleadings. There's a basic asymmetry

between Job and God: no matter where Job looks, he can't seem to find God, and yet he's aware that God constantly sees and judges him—*he* can't hide from God. Overall, it seems like Job wants God to be accessible and understandable on Job's own terms.

When God finally responds to Job, he shows that, in fact, he is both incredibly close to his creation and infinitely beyond creation. God speaks "out of the whirlwind," an image that suggests that God is right within his creation, and yet he's mysteriously distinct from it, too—his voice can be heard, but he can't be physically seen. This suggests that God is physically close, but it doesn't mean he's predictable or reducible to human understanding. The bulk of God's speech consists of precise and intimate details of creation—like the measurement of the earth's dimensions or the depth of the sea—and he asks Job if Job can "bind the chains" of the constellations or if he knows when mountain goats give birth to their young. God also gives poetic descriptions of two mysterious, mythic creatures (Behemoth and Leviathan) which are monstrous in strength, and yet they're like tame pets for God. This long meditation on creation shows that God is both closely involved with overseeing his creation and, at the same time, is powerful beyond anything human beings can understand.

God's response shows that, while he does pay attention to his creation, and is even present in its midst, he is far too great for his creatures to understand, and the appropriate response to this mystery is not protest, but worship. In a way, God's speech confirms Job's complaints about him—God *is* both alarmingly close and untouchably distant. But God's point is that this shouldn't be grounds for complaint, but instead should compel Job to worship him—after all, if God can be trusted with the vast and detailed universe, can't Job trust him with his own life, too? But doing so requires Job to accept that God's nature and ways are a mystery Job can never fully grasp. Accordingly, Job admits that he's been talking about things he doesn't understand—things "too wonderful" for him—and he humbly repents of his arrogance. With his questions, Job essentially tried to pry into God's mysteries. Now he understands that this will never bring him to full understanding, but now that he's been reacquainted with the mystery of God, his relationship with God is restored to the way it should be—he's a humble creature worshiping his creator.

HUMAN WISDOM VS. DIVINE WISDOM

When three of Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) hear of Job's suffering, they come to comfort him. But when Job complains that God has punished him for no reason, Job's friends take turns arguing with this point. They argue that God causes people to suffer because of their sins and that he rewards the righteous; to assert otherwise, they contend, is to accuse God of being unjust and so to attack God's character. They also insist that Job must not be telling the truth—he *must* have committed some sin and should repent if he hopes for relief from his suffering. Meanwhile, Job accuses his companions of being "miserable comforters" and resists the "empty nothings" they offer him. Finally, near the end of the book, God himself addresses Job. He takes Job to task for presuming to question him, as it's God's place to question mortals and theirs to answer. God relentlessly interrogates Job, mocking him with questions about the mysteries of nature until both Job and his friends fall silent. God's response to both Job and his companions suggests that even when people offer explanations that are technically accurate (after all, generally speaking, goodness often *is* rewarded and evil punished), such explanations are often applied to human situations in a simplistic way. This, in turn, shows the big difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom: while people see only a small part of a situation and make assumptions, God knows everything, and his wisdom is perfect.

Job's friends initially argue that God always punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. First they take turns arguing that God only punishes people who are wicked—as Eliphaz proverbially puts it, the wicked "plow iniquity / and sow trouble," and they accordingly reap the same. In other words, there's a sort of cold logic to the way God treats people—if you do bad things, bad things will happen to you (and vice versa). Similarly, Zophar insists that if one just looks at the lives of the wicked, it's obvious that they suffer misery in return for their misdeeds: their lives are short, and even their children suffer. The men argue that there's empirical proof that wickedness is always punished (and, by implication, that goodness is always rewarded).

According to Job's friends' logic, it then follows that Job himself must have sinned. Bildad argues that people who forget God are like dried-up reeds which, without water, inevitably wither. Such an image suggests that the relationship between human action and reward is as automatic as the cycles of nature. Later, Eliphaz doubles down and directly accuses Job of being cruel to widows and orphans. Since God sees everything from heaven, God knows what Job has done, and it only makes sense that Job is suffering as a result. If Job turns from his sin, the friends conclude, God will once again bless Job. Eliphaz urges Job to turn from greed and instead make *God* his "**gold**," presuming to know what's in Job's mind and telling him how to get back on track. Likewise, Elihu (a newcomer to the debate) argues that suffering is typically God's way of pulling a person back from sin, "opening [their] ear by adversity," implying that this must be Job's situation, too.

Rejecting his friends' arguments and assumptions, Job wishes he could argue with God directly and thereby vindicate himself. Job retorts that if he's done something to earn God's anger, then his friends should tell him what it is—implying that if the logic of reward and punishment is so straightforward, then it

should be obvious why Job is suffering like this. Job also longs to speak to God directly instead of having to listen to his friends' "worthless" arguments—recognizing that his friends' supposed "wisdom" is lacking and that it doesn't speak for God, whatever their claims. Job takes for granted that human and divine wisdom are totally different things.

God mocks Job's pretensions to wisdom and doesn't even deign to respond to Job's friends, suggesting that limited human wisdom is incapable of grasping God's omniscient (all-knowing) wisdom. Speaking out of the **whirlwind**, God demands to know who's speaking "words without knowledge," quickly dismissing Job's laments and arguments (and implicitly his friends' as well). He then directly attacks Job's lack of wisdom about the creation and workings of the world. God implies that if Job doesn't understand the first thing about how the world was made, then he can't pretend to understand God's reasons for allowing his suffering, either.

But God's interrogation of Job also suggests a note of comfort. As the Book of Job progresses, Job and his companions basically go around and around on the same theme (why do the righteous suffer?) without resolving anything. God's speech confronts Job and his friends with the fact that their wisdom will *never* measure up to divine wisdom—but this also breaks them out of their impasse, forcing them to acknowledge a far greater source of wisdom than themselves.

FAITH IN SUFFERING

When Job hears the news that he's lost his children and all his possessions, he immediately responds by tearing his robe and shaving his head (traditional signs of mourning in the ancient Near East). He then falls to the ground and worships God, saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Even after Job himself is afflicted with terrible sores, he continues to "maintain his integrity" by refusing to curse God and believing that people must accept both good and bad things from God's hand. Ultimately, though, Job can't reconcile the apparent contradiction between what he believes about God (that God is just) and the way God appears to be treating him (unjustly). Because of this inconsistency, Job wants to "argue his case" to God to prove his innocence. Job's determination to confront God, though later criticized as arrogant, does show that Job believes God is ultimately a just judge. And at the end of the book, God does restore Job's fortunes, granting him greater blessings than he had before. The Book of Job takes it for granted that innocent people will suffer; the bigger question, it suggests, is how they *respond* to that suffering. By using the character of Job as a model of persistent faith, the book suggests that sufferers exercise faith in God by continuing to trust him even when they have no guarantee of answers, respite, or reward.

Satan believes that if God allows bad things to happen to Job, Job will curse God. While God finds Job to be his "blameless" "servant," Satan contends that Job only worships God because God has protected him and granted him good things. If God allows Satan to harm Job, Satan argues, Job will surely turn from God and even curse him. In other words, Satan charges that Job's faith is superficial and that as soon as that faith is really challenged, it will quickly crumble. However, Job's immediate reaction to his loss is to praise God even while he mourns. Fallen on the ground with his robe torn and his head shaven, Job declares, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD," a statement affirming that no matter what God has permitted to happen to Job, Job still trusts him and worships him. Even after God allows Satan to afflict Job himself with a terrible disease, Job refuses his wife's recommendation that he just "curse God, and die," because people must receive both good and bad things from God. Job's reactions suggest that in tragedy, a faithful person should trust God and his ways, even if they're hard to understand.

Even when Job begins to complain about his suffering and to argue with God, the fact that he *does* argue (and doesn't simply curse God) suggests that God is ultimately just. Job insists on defending himself before God even if "he will kill me [and] I will have no hope," trusting that somehow, God will uphold Job's innocence in the end. Job's words suggest that stating his case is worth risking God's deadly wrath—he clearly has faith that, in some mysterious way, God will hear and vindicate Job even beyond death. In the same speech in which he claims that God regards him as an enemy, Job also asserts that his "Redeemer lives" and that he will someday see this divine vindicator on his side. Without denying the severity of his pain, Job continues to believe that God, though he doesn't *appear* to be on Job's side right now, will someday redeem Job from his suffering. Job trusts that his current argument with God isn't the end of the story. Job insists that it's a matter of his "integrity" to maintain his innocence, and that, as long as God continues to grant him life, he won't say anything false. His refusal to give up suggests that, on some level, he still trusts God to make things right in the end.

At the end of the book, God *does* vindicate Job, suggesting that Job is a model of faith in the midst of suffering. At the end of the book, God calls Job his "servant" just as he did at the beginning, and he tells Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar that he'll forgive their foolish speech if Job prays for them—effectively confirming that Job was right in maintaining his innocence all along and that the other men should look up to Job as a model of faithfulness, not the other way around. After all of Job's suffering, God also grants Job twice the riches he had before, gives him more children, and prolongs his life, rewarding Job's integrity. Though the book makes it clear that material prosperity doesn't tell the full story about a person either way, it also reaffirms that God is good to people who trust in him.

Ultimately, Job doesn't receive clear-cut answers from God, he suffers greatly in the meantime, and he isn't given any promise of reward until the end. Job is upheld as a model of faith in suffering because, even when he wrestles with God and struggles to trust him, he doesn't give up or turn away from God.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS METALS

Gold, silver, and other precious metals symbolize the worthlessness of earthly wealth compared to the priceless treasure of worshiping God. If gold is the most precious earthly commodity, then God is immeasurably greater. In one of his speeches, Eliphaz urges Job to stop desiring "gold" and to regard God as his "gold and [...] precious silver" instead; if he does so, Eliphaz argues, then God will remove Job's suffering. In other words, Eliphaz accuses Job of being greedy (presumably one of the misdeeds that has brought on Job's suffering). But if Job values God the way he should (more than anything on earth), then God will forgive him.

Later in the book, Job similarly compares precious metals to divine wisdom. He reflects that miners unearth gems from deep underground, but they cannot find wisdom there; nor can their gold *buy* wisdom—only God knows where it is, and wisdom's value surpasses that of any earthly currency. Job implies that wisdom is ultimately a divine gift; people can't discover and hoard it by their own efforts, and even if wisdom were for sale, it's such a treasure that all the earth's riches wouldn't be enough to pay for it. Job's reflections also represent a shift from earlier in the book, when Job and his friends focused on human righteousness and wickedness, to Job's growing focus on God's power and majesty in the book's closing chapters.

WHIRLWIND

Whirlwinds symbolize God's overwhelming presence, which is too mighty and mysterious for a human being to comprehend. As natural phenomena, whirlwinds are terrifying things; along with floods, Job names them among the catastrophes that God sends to terrorize the wicked. Elsewhere, Elihu lists them among the weather marvels that God mysteriously sends to earth, originating from God's own breath. So, in the book's climactic moment, when God speaks to Job "out of the whirlwind," it's clear that God's presence is meant to overwhelm Job with its power and mystery. God then questions Job, accusing him of speaking "words without knowledge" and bombarding Job with facts about God's power and wisdom that he doesn't understand because of his human limitations. Job accordingly humbles himself and repents of his arrogance in questioning God, admitting that he is small and shouldn't speak further. At the same time, the fact that God *does* answer Job out of the whirlwind—after Job has repeatedly stated his desire to address God personally in the midst of his sufferings—suggests that God's power isn't simply stunning and violent, but also *gracious*—God listens, hears, and cares for Job in his distress, even if he doesn't respond on Job's limited, human terms. Thus the whirlwind imagery supports the book's argument that although God might not offer a clear answer to the problem of human suffering (and that even if he did, it's not one humans could grasp), he is definitely not absent or indifferent in the midst of suffering.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* published in 2001.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did.

Related Characters: Job, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1:1-5

Explanation and Analysis

This is the Book of Job's opening passage. The passage's tone and imagery—the opening phrase "there was once a man," and the huge numbers of animals Job owns, for

example—immediately convey a legendary feeling. This isn't to say that there's no historical basis for the story (a range of scholarly opinion exists on that question), but to suggest that the audience is being prepared for a particular *type* of story—namely, a story with larger-than-life characters and events that will teach a lesson of some kind.

The passage also establishes what kind of person Job is—a foundational point for the book as a whole. Job is morally exemplary, he worships Israel's God, he is a devoted family patriarch, and he is very successful. In fact, these characteristics fit together in a way that would immediately make sense to the Bible's original audience in the ancient Near East. Not only does Job himself avoid doing evil, but he also cares about the moral state of those under his authority. For instance, just in case his children sin during their big parties, Job offers sacrifices to God on their behalf. This fact shows that when it comes to honoring God, Job doesn't neglect a single detail. And Job's abundant riches indicate that God has rewarded him for his piety and integrity. Everything about Job's life, then, makes sense: he lives the way a good servant of God ought to live, and he is rewarded accordingly. Thus the book's opening passage prepares readers for the coming interruption of Job's situation and the questions that disaster will raise about both Job and God.

The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

Related Characters: God, Satan (speaker), Job

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1:8–12

Explanation and Analysis

After Job's introduction, the prologue's action suddenly shifts to the heavenly realm, where Satan appears and talks with God. At this early stage in the development of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, "Satan" wasn't a proper name in quite the sense that it's understood today; the Hebrew *ha-satan* simply meant "the adversary" or "the accuser." So Satan comes across as a marginal character, neither good nor completely devilish and estranged from God. Though he's not banned from heaven, he clearly takes a challenging stance toward God when he happens to show up there.

Since Satan has been aimlessly wandering the earth, God suggests an assignment, drawing Satan's attention to God's blameless follower Job. Satan immediately takes the bait, arguing that God has "put a fence" around Job—that is, protected Job from harm and ensured his blessing. Satan suggests that if God just withdraws his protection and lets Job's possessions be harmed, Job will stop worshiping God and curse him instead. The implication is that Job is only serving God because God gives him nice things.

Importantly, God remains in control of this whole interaction. God points out Job as a target, and after Satan finishes speaking, God *allows* Satan to harm Job's loved ones and belongings. This dynamic suggests that though Satan smites Job, he's merely an instrument in God's hands. It signals to the audience that *God* ultimately holds power over both good and bad events, and that when God permits bad things to happen, he has a purpose in them—points that will be key throughout the story.

Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; 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.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1:20–22

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Job's reaction after his children and servants are killed and his livestock stolen in a series of sudden disasters. In the biblical world, tearing one's robe and shaving one's head were practices associated with mourning. Yet in practically the same moment that Job makes these sorrowful gestures, showing the gravity of his loss, Job also worships God. The actions of grief and worship are presented as continuous with each other, not mismatched. In other words, the book suggests that sincere grief shouldn't stifle worship of God.

Job's response indicates that he definitely attributes these disasters to God. Even though God essentially deputized

Satan to carry them out, the book clearly presents God as the giver of both good things and bad. Job's proclamation, "Naked I came…" means that Job was born without any possessions to his name and that he'll die in the same way; God has given Job everything he has and, implicitly, God is therefore entitled to take away what he's given. In both cases, Job, as God's servant, must still worship God ("blessed be the name of the Lord"). By pointing out that Job "did not sin" here, the Bible praises Job's actions as the proper response to suffering. It also sets up a contrast with the way Job will respond to escalated sufferings later in the book.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Related Characters: Job's Wife, Job (speaker), God, Satan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2:7–10

Explanation and Analysis

This passage recounts Job's second test, when Satan, with God's permission, causes Job to suffer from a tormenting disease. It's a pitiful image—Job slumps in the dirt and scrapes at himself with a discarded piece of pottery. Even Job's wife seems to be disgusted by the sight of him; speaking for the only time in the book, she criticizes his actions, too. She tells him that after all this, he should give up on God and curse him instead, even if God strikes him dead for it. It's not a flattering picture of Job's wife, whom Job dismisses as a "foolish woman." The bigger point, though, is that Job's wife exemplifies a typically *human* view of events—that it looks like God has cruelly afflicted Job for no reason, and therefore Job should turn his back on God. In this way, she serves as a foil for Job, who strives for a divine perspective even in the midst of his suffering. Job argues that God bestows good and bad things alike and that it's not up to human beings to accept the good while rejecting the bad. In essence, that would be assuming that one understands life's full picture and that one is therefore wiser than God. Job refuses to do this, and the book clearly states that in maintaining this stance, Job "did not sin."

❝ Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

Related Characters: Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2:11-13

Explanation and Analysis

While Job sits silently enduring his losses of loved ones, property, and health, three "friends" appear on the scene. They arrive with a plan to "comfort" Job, though the author might intend an ironic edge to this word—though the three friends definitely make Job's suffering their business, their involvement becomes the opposite of "comforting."

For now, though, the three men's appearance underscores the intensity of Job's plight. His illness, and perhaps the wasting effect of his grief, has transformed him so dramatically that his friends do not recognize him immediately. They weep and, like Job did earlier, engage in traditional mourning rituals. Then they silently accompany Job for seven days and nights *because* "his suffering was very great." The author subtly suggests that when Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sit wordlessly with Job, they respond quite properly to their friend's situation—that in response to terrible suffering, sympathy and companionship are more suitable than speech. In any case, the friends' "comfort" doesn't last long—much of the rest of the book will be taken up with the friends' unsuccessful attempts to apply their so-called "wisdom" to Job's pain.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. Job said:

"Let the day perish in which I was born,
and the night that said,
'A man-child is conceived.'
Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
or light shine on it."

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3:1–4

Explanation and Analysis

This passage immediately follows Job's seven-day period of silence with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. At this moment, as the book transitions from prose to poetry, Job bursts out in anguish over his suffering.

Though Job laments the day he was born, suggesting that his patient acceptance of suffering has ended, he doesn't curse God. He doesn't even express a wish to die. Rather, he curses the time of his birth, since that moment inexorably led to his present suffering. Of course it's not possible for that day to become "darkness" (that is, for his life to have never begun), but the intensity of Job's speech expresses his distress at the way his life has unfolded. The removal of God's blessings from his life is painful enough that he would rather they had never happened.

In the rest of this first speech, Job continues to wish for quiet rest in the grave, so that he could enjoy relief from his current pain (which, again, Job attributes to the removal of God's blessings). As in his preference for "darkness" over God's "light," Job essentially desires a reversal of creation—destruction and chaos instead of creative order. (In the Book of Genesis, God spoke creation into being by uttering "Let there be light" into formless chaos.) By the end of the Book of Job, the darkness and chaos of Job's life will be restored to life and order—signs of God's renewed favor.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ How happy is the one whom God reproves;
therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

For he wounds, but he binds up;
he strikes, but his hands heal.

[…]

See, we have searched this out; it is true.
Hear, and know it for yourself.

Related Characters: Eliphaz the Temanite (speaker), Job, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5:17–27

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is part of Eliphaz's first speech, the first speech in the Book of Job's three cycles of dialogues between Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Job. Out of the many speeches to come, this one is relatively mild. It even begins by acknowledging Job's history of providing wise counsel to many. But Eliphaz quickly moves to an assertion that he and Job's other friends repeat many times: that people basically reap what they sow. That means that if Job is suffering, then he must have done something to deserve it—though Eliphaz never says *what*, specifically, he thinks Job has done. Then Eliphaz moves on, encouraging Job to embrace his suffering. That's because suffering is a form of God's discipline, meant to prompt a wrongdoer to mend their ways and turn to God once again (God "wounds" but "binds up"; he "strikes" but "heals").

By asserting this, Eliphaz makes big assumptions about Job's situation. He assumes he knows *why* Job is suffering (because Job did something wrong, and God is punishing him) and how Job can fix it (by acknowledging what he did wrong and accepting the punishment). He closes with a rather presumptuous "See […] it is true. / Hear […] for yourself." Eliphaz's words sum up his approach (and self-righteous attitude) throughout the book. While his basic moral framework isn't necessarily wrong (after all, people *do* often suffer because of their misdeeds), the book will develop the idea that Eliphaz and the other friends aren't truly wise, because they apply their knowledge ignorantly.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Those who withhold kindness from a friend
forsake the fear of the Almighty.

My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed,
like freshets that pass away,
that run dark with ice,
turbid with melting snow.

In time of heat they disappear;
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God, Eliphaz the Temanite

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6:14–17

Explanation and Analysis

This is part of Job's reply to Eliphaz's first speech. Eliphaz has just encouraged Job to remember that wicked people get what they deserve, and that Job should accept his calamity as God's way of disciplining him for his wickedness. Job rejects Eliphaz's opinion—or, at least, he rejects its application to his situation. While it might be true that evildoers often get what they deserve, Job does not accept Eliphaz's assertion that *he* must be guilty of some hidden sin. In this section of Job's speech, he actually rebukes Eliphaz and his other friends for accusing him this way.

Job complains that his friends "withhold kindness" by accusing him of wrong, and that this reflects their lack of reverence for God. He even likens them to a "torrent-bed" which fills with floodwaters after the winter snows have melted, but by the time the days grow hot, it has completely dried up. Commentators have suggested that the author might have been picturing a desert wadi which was subject to dangerous flash floods while remaining dry most of the time. Job accuses his friends of being "treacherous" like this kind of desert stream—either parched or overflowing, never offering the proper refreshment a thirsty person needs. He implies that Eliphaz's flood of words, while perhaps looking impressive, offers no comfort for a sufferer like himself.

Chapter 7 Quotes

What are human beings, that you make so much of them,
that you set your mind on them,
visit them every morning,
test them every moment?

Will you not look away from me for a while,
let me alone until I swallow my spittle?

If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity?

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7:17–21

Explanation and Analysis

Job continues his speech in response to Eliphaz, but he turns from addressing his friend to directly addressing God. The beginning of this section sounds a lot like another biblical passage, Psalm 8, which asks God, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" However, the Psalm praises God for granting human beings so much glory and honor, while in this passage, Job begs God to *stop* paying such close attention to humanity—God's oversight feels like a threat, not a blessing. Enduring his suffering, Job feels that God mercilessly "visits" and "tests" him, burdening him constantly with his silent, looming presence. God's presence weighs Job down so much that Job feels like he can't even swallow. And even if Job *does* sin (as his friends have been accusing him of doing), how does that really affect God, who is so immeasurably great that he "watches" all of humanity at once, able to crush them with his power?

This passage is a good example of what Job sees as the paradoxical mystery of God. On one hand, Job longs to speak with God face to face, as it were, to get an explanation for his sufferings; yet God seems totally distant or even absent. At the same time, though, God is uncomfortably close, constantly watching, all-seeing, and implicitly judging Job. In short, God isn't a fellow human being who can be comprehended; he cannot be grasped on Job's terms, or else he would not be God.

Chapter 9 Quotes

He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength
—who has resisted him, and succeeded?—
he who removes mountains, and they do not know it,
when he overturns them in his anger;
[…]
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 understanding,
and marvelous things without number.

Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 9:4-11

Explanation and Analysis

This speech is part of Job's response to his friend Bildad, who has just urged Job to live righteously so that God will restore Job's fortunes. Job opened his response by agreeing that God is just in his treatment of people. But as he considers God's majesty and might, he doubts that his own doings make that much of a difference to God.

Instead of giving a point-by-point response to Bildad's argument, Job offers what Bible scholars call a participial hymn. It's called that because of the Hebrew verb form (participial) found at the beginning of the verses: "he who removes […] who made […] who does […]." Such hymns appear throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe God's creative acts. Here, Job sometimes uses the form to emphasize the *destructive* things God does, like overturning mountains. But whether he's praising God's creativity in making the oceans or constellations, or expressing awe at God's ability to shake the earth, Job's main point is that no human being can understand what God does—and because of that, no mere human should dare resist God. Moreover, despite all the evidence of God's work in the natural world, God *himself* cannot be seen or perceived, as Job notes in the last verse. This is part of the mysterious, indeed almost ironic, characterization of God in the Book of Job. His presence can be discerned all around, and yet his very majesty gives a person like Job pause—does he dare argue his case to such a God?

Chapter 12 Quotes

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants 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 every human being.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God, Zophar the Naamathite

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 12:7-10

Explanation and Analysis

Zophar has just made a speech admonishing Job for failing to discern God's wisdom. He claims that if only Job would change his (allegedly sinful) ways and turn to God, then God would surely bless Job.

At first glance, Job's response looks like another hymn praising God's creative power. However, it's more complex—and even more biting—than that. Job concedes that Zophar is right about God's power over everything, including his own difficult circumstances. But, he continues, Zophar isn't alone in his insights; in fact, *all* creatures—animals, birds, plants (!), and fish—understand this, not just humans supposedly gifted with wisdom. Of course, Job doesn't mean that birds or fish can literally make speeches about God; he means that the natural world is filled with evidence of God's power, so what Zophar is telling Job isn't some new revelation. It's *obvious* that God has power over every creature and every event, both good and bad.

Further, Job implies that by wielding his so-called wisdom like a weapon, Zophar totally fails to help Job. Zophar thinks he understands something about God that Job doesn't—but actually, Zophar's self-righteousness blinds him from usefully applying that knowledge to Job's situation. If he realized this, Job hints, then Zophar might actually be humbler, and thus more comforting, to his friend.

Chapter 13 Quotes

Let me have silence, and I will speak,
and let come on me what may.

I will take my flesh in my teeth,
and put my life in my hand.

See, he will kill me; I have no hope;
but I will defend my ways to his face.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13:13-15

Explanation and Analysis

After the first cycle of speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job gives a speech of self-defense followed by a longer lament directed to God. Basically, Job asserts that no matter what God does to him in response, Job will take his life in his own hands and continue to maintain his innocence before God. By doing so, he implicitly demands an explanation from God for the reason behind his suffering.

This section includes one of the Book of Job's most famous lines. Here, in the New Revised Standard Version, it's translated "he will kill me; I have no hope." Many versions translate the same line, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him"—the traditional and more familiar rendering. The difference is due to ambiguities in the original Hebrew; it doesn't necessarily create a big problem for interpretation, however. The overall point is that Job knows that boldly defending himself before God could end up costing him his life—God could strike him dead in an instant. But that won't stop Job from telling the truth, trusting that somehow, a good and just God will set things right in the end. So the line "he will kill me; I have no hope" could be interpreted to mean that Job has no hope that God will spare his life; the line "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" means that *even if* God kills him, he won't stop trusting in God. Either way, the passage's overall meaning doesn't change: the possibility of death won't deter Job from speaking honestly to God. The Book of Job ultimately upholds this attitude as exemplary faith in the midst of suffering.

Only grant two things to me,
then I will not hide myself from your face:

withdraw your hand far from me,
and do not let dread of you terrify me.

Then call, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and you reply to me.

[...]

Why do you hide your face,
and count me as your enemy?

Will you frighten a windblown leaf
and pursue dry chaff?

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13:20-25

Explanation and Analysis

Job continues his long prayer to God in response to his friends' reprimands. In short, he pleads with God not to frighten him so much, treating him like a dried-up leaf that's helplessly blown along by the wind; then, Job suggests, he and God could communicate openly.

This poetic passage captures the inherent mystery of God as portrayed throughout the Book of Job. To a struggling human being like Job, God seems both too close and too far away. On one hand, Job feels the need to hide himself from God's face and begs God to "withdraw [his] hand" because his presence weighs so heavily on Job. On the other hand, God seems to "hide" *his* "face" as though he refuses to even look at Job. This seeming contradiction points to the fact that in the Bible, a person can't encounter God the same way they encounter another human being. God is believed to be omniscient (present everywhere), yet he is so great and so far beyond mortal comprehension that a human being can't claim to understand him or even easily perceive him—he defies limited senses and reason. For Job, such an encounter is overwhelming and frightening.

This passage also suggests that despite his friends' lengthy speeches, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar haven't actually *helped* Job. Their words aren't worthy of much of a response; that's why Job spends more time appealing directly to God. This accords with the book's overall position on how humans should deal with suffering—ultimately, they won't find answers from even the wisest and most well-meaning friends, but they must look to God instead.

Chapter 19 Quotes

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19:25-27

Explanation and Analysis

Bildad has just given a speech arguing that the wicked are always punished by God. In response, Job again rejects his friends' tormenting "comfort" and complains that it feels like they're pursuing him as relentlessly as God does.

Then comes one of the Book of Job's most famous passages. Even after lamenting that he feels persecuted both by his friends and God, Job declares that he trusts in his "redeemer." Moreover, he believes that someday—even if he suffers decay first—he will stand on the earth and see that redeemer with his own eyes. To its original audience, this passage would probably have sounded strange, and later interpreters have raised plenty of questions about it, too—the most persistent being the "redeemer's" identity. Is this figure human or divine? In biblical times, the term "kinsman-redeemer" was applied to a person, often an extended family member, who would vouch for and provide for a vulnerable person. But it's also the case that "redeemer" is a title that's frequently applied to God through the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible—he is worshiped as the rescuer of individual people, as well as the people of Israel as a whole. This is why later Christian interpreters have particularly applied this passage to Jesus Christ, even seeing a hint of the later Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection.

However, though unresolved ambiguities remain, a divine redeemer would still have been a possibility for the book's original Jewish audience as well. That interpretation is certainly consistent with Job's confidence, expressed throughout, that even though Job doesn't understand God's ways and often fears him, he still trusts that God will vindicate him in the end.

Chapter 22 Quotes

Agree with God, and be at peace;
in this way good will come to you.

Receive instruction from his mouth,
and lay up his words in your heart.

If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored,
if you remove unrighteousness from your tents,
[...]
and if the Almighty is your gold
and your precious silver,
then you will delight yourself in the Almighty,
and lift up your face to God.

Related Characters: Eliphaz the Temanite (speaker), God, Job

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22:21-26

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an excerpt from Eliphaz's third and final speech. This speech has a much more heated tone, as Eliphaz begins by not just insinuating (as he's done before), but outright *accusing* Job of wicked behavior.

As the speech goes on, Eliphaz's language softens somewhat, but his implications are no less insulting. He basically starts lecturing Job, telling him that if he obeys God and values God above material wealth, Job will finally find relief from his suffering. As before, he also assumes that there is some kind of "unrighteousness" in Job's household that Job must purge if he wants God to forgive him.

Eliphaz's third speech doesn't differ greatly from his first two speeches. This just goes to show that Eliphaz (and Job's other friends) hasn't learned a thing from Job's arguments; he's just been doubling down on his opinions, clinging to his self-righteous assumptions about Job's morality. It's another example of the book's perspective that someone can say technically accurate things about God and humanity, while utterly failing to wisely apply those things to another person's situation. In other words, there's a big difference between knowledge and wisdom—and Job's friends lack the latter.

Chapter 23 Quotes

If I go forward, he is not there;
or backward, I cannot perceive him;
on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;
I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.

But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold.

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 23:8-10

Explanation and Analysis

After Eliphaz finally stops talking, Job offers his response. Unlike the last two rounds, however, Job seems less concerned this time about defending himself against his friends' stubborn assumptions. After all, they haven't given any evidence that they're actually listening. At this point, Job is more concerned about where he stands with God.

Job's relationship with God remains ambivalent. He knows that God is the only one worth pleading his case to—by now, it's clear that he's not going to receive a fair hearing from other human beings. Just before this passage, he even expresses the wish that he could visit God's "house" to speak to him face to face. Yet there's an insoluble problem—God is nowhere to be found. No matter what direction Job turns, the Almighty eludes his search. Job's language of forward and backward, left and right isn't meant to be taken literally, but it conveys Job's bewilderment as he struggles to "find" God within his disorienting circumstances.

Adding to Job's confusion is the fact that God knows where *he* is ("he knows the way that I take") even as Job fails to find God. There's an unavoidable asymmetry between the all-knowing God and limited mortals. But Job manages to find a measure of comfort in this, knowing that everything he's been through is God's "testing" of him and will somehow benefit him in the end.

Chapter 26 Quotes

By his power he stilled the Sea;
by his understanding he struck down Rahab.

By his wind the heavens were made fair;
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways;
and how small a whisper do we hear of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26:12-14

Explanation and Analysis

The third cycle of arguments is abruptly cut short when Job impatiently interrupts Bildad's final speech. Then Job launches into a long meditation on the mystery of God. These verses contain some particularly striking ancient Near Eastern imagery—the "Sea" was regarded as a chaotic realm that only God could subdue (a belief reflected in the creation story in the opening verses of Genesis, the Bible's first book). "Rahab" seems to be a proper name for the "fleeing serpent" mentioned two lines later—a threatening sea creature of some kind which God easily "struck down" and "pierced." Altogether, it's clear that God holds power over enigmatic, unpredictable forces—suggesting that God defies human understanding.

The upshot of this speech is to turn Job's friends' arguments against them. While they have repeatedly urged Job to humble himself by acknowledging he can't comprehend God's ways, Job points out that *they* have too high an opinion of their own wisdom (after all, Job has described only "the outskirts of [God's] ways"). This implies that they should reconsider their hasty judgments of Job's situation.

Chapter 28 Quotes

God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.

For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens.

When he gave to the wind its weight,
and apportioned out the waters by measure;

[…]

then he saw [wisdom] and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out.

And he said to humankind,
'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'"

Related Characters: Job, God (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28:23-28

Explanation and Analysis

After his three friends finish their speeches, Job offers a long defense summarizing the position he's maintained throughout the book—namely, that he is innocent, that his sufferings aren't somehow the result of sins he's committed, and that God's wisdom surpasses human wisdom. Just before this, Job used gold mining as a metaphor for seeking wisdom. In this passage, he argues that, in fact, only God knows where wisdom can be found. God "understands the way to [wisdom], / and he knows its place."

It's an understatement to say that God "knows" wisdom. Job goes on to elaborate that God is not only omniscient (sees and knows everything) but is the creator of everything that exists, so he is wisdom's *source*, too. Job quotes God as saying that "the fear of the Lord […] is wisdom"—a statement echoed in the Bible's Book of Proverbs. Job means that only by seeking God—not by asserting their own mortal insights—can people find true wisdom.

This conclusion effectively draws Job's *and* his friends' arguments to a close. In the end, the book upholds God's wisdom as what all the characters lack to some degree or another; and his wisdom is so great that even the wisest human being can never stop seeking it.

Chapter 32 Quotes

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, though they had declared Job to be in the wrong. Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he. But when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry.

Related Characters: Job, Elihu, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32:1-5

Explanation and Analysis

After many chapters of poetry, the book briefly switches back to prose in order to introduce a new character. Job's friends have given up at this point—whether or not they accept his arguments, they can see that there's no point in trying to persuade Job any further, because *he's* convinced that he's "righteous." Somebody else wants a turn, though—a previously unmentioned figure named Elihu. It's not clear whether Elihu's full name ("son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram") is given because it would be familiar to the book's original audience, or in order to show that this newcomer is rather pretentious. The rest of the passage lends support to the latter interpretation.

Because Elihu is younger than the other men, he has silently listened so far, but he can no longer refrain from speaking. He is dissatisfied not just with Job, but with Job's friends' inadequate arguments. Indeed, the repetition of "angry" in the passage ("angry at Job," "angry also at Job's three friends," "he became angry") gives an impression of a hot-headed, self-important youth who thinks he knows something his elders don't. In the ensuing chapters, the book leaves it up to the audience to decide whether Elihu really does have something to say. The passage hints that, as with Job's three friends, people want to believe they're offering wise advice, but they usually don't know what they're talking about.

Chapter 38 Quotes

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me."

Related Characters: God (speaker), Job

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 38:1-3

Explanation and Analysis

After Elihu finishes speaking, God abruptly speaks for the first time in the book. He completely disregards not just Elihu (who just finished his speeches), but the arguments of Job's friends, too. God speaks "out of the whirlwind," meaning that he isn't seen visibly, but his voice is heard from within a violent windstorm, symbolizing God's dangerous power.

God doesn't answer Job's questions. In fact, he immediately starts questioning *Job* instead. He demands to know, essentially, who Job thinks he is. He characterizes Job's many speeches as "words without knowledge"—a harsh assessment, but one that reinforces the book's overall perspective on God. God has been portrayed as indescribably lofty, so it only makes sense that human attempts to talk about him would be empty compared to what God is really like. God then tells Job, in no uncertain terms, to get ready for more questions—to "gird" his "loins," or prepare himself as though for battle. God will speak to Job as Job has wanted, but he won't be doing it on Job's terms.

Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?

[...]

Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,
or given understanding to the mind?

Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?

Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cling together?

Related Characters: God (speaker), Job

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38:31-38

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is an excerpt of God's lengthy, rather relentless interrogation of Job. He repeatedly asks Job "who" is responsible for various elements of the natural world and understands them. The obvious answer is "God," but a one-word answer isn't the point. Rather, the point of the speech is to overwhelm Job (and the audience) with God's power and majesty.

The poetic language throughout this section underscores the book's perspective that God's creative work is fundamentally mysterious. God puts the constellations in their places; he empowers human minds; he knows how many clouds are in the sky at any given time, and he makes it rain by tilting the skies like a skin of water. Obviously, none of these examples actually explain *how* God does these things; the metaphors illustrate, instead, that God does what nobody else can do, and in ways that no human mind can fathom. The overall force of this section is to humble Job by reminding him that he is dealing with God, not a human interlocutor.

Chapter 41 Quotes

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook,
or press down its tongue with a cord?

Can you put a rope in its nose,
or pierce its jaw with a hook?

[...]

Will you play with it as with a bird,
or will you put it on leash for your girls?

Related Characters: God (speaker), Job

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41:1-5

Explanation and Analysis

Over the past few chapters, God has spoken to Job as Job has been pleading with him to do, but it hasn't gone anything like Job expected. Instead of straightforwardly answering Job's questions about the reason for his suffering, God relentlessly questions Job about things only God can know, especially the mysteries of creation.

In this passage, God specifically names Leviathan, a

mysterious aquatic creature. Bible scholars can only speculate about this creature's identity—it could be a crocodile, or it could be a reference to some sort of mythical animal. (The same dilemma applies to Behemoth, a creature described in the previous chapter—possibly a hippopotamus.) God's purpose in the Leviathan example is to further drive home Job's lack of wisdom about the world. The answer to God's questions is obviously "no"—Job can't fish Leviathan out of the water, lead it around by a rope, or give it to his daughters for a pet. These whimsical illustrations suggest that God *could* do all that—but, more to the point, they also show what a relationship between the Creator and his creatures should look like, from a biblical perspective (that is, even the fierce Leviathan trusts and obeys God; shouldn't Job humbly do the same?).

Chapter 42 Quotes

Then Job answered the Lord:

"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
[…]

therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

Related Characters: Job (speaker), God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42:1-6

Explanation and Analysis

After God finishes questioning Job, Job's questions and complaints remain unresolved. Yet the book suggests that Job gets the answers he really needed from God. Job replies to God not by offering another self-defending speech, but by acknowledging God's power and wisdom and repenting of his own arrogance. After listening to God, Job understands that God can do anything, and that nothing prevents him from accomplishing what he intends to do. He also quotes God's initial question and admits that in speaking about God, Job didn't know what he was talking about—God is much greater and more powerful than Job's highest imagining. This all implies that Job's sufferings certainly fall within God's unstoppable purpose, and that Job was wrong to assume he could fully understand that purpose, just as he can't understand God's mysterious creating and sustaining of the whole universe. In saying, "I despise myself," Job isn't expressing self-hatred so much as he's recognizing how utterly small he is compared to God. His humble attitude echoes his worshipful posture at the beginning of the book, bringing Job full circle.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. […] The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. […] After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

Related Characters: Job, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42:10-17

Explanation and Analysis

This is the Book of Job's final passage, returning to the prose of the book's beginning. In fact, the closing passage parallels the beginning in many ways. God gives Job exactly twice the numbers of livestock he had before disaster struck, and he also gives Job the same number of children he previously lost. Job also lives to 140, which is twice 70 (an age the Bible elsewhere identifies as the typical span of a human life).

The point of these details is not to emphasize the precise numbers (or to suggest that such terrible losses can be easily replaced), but to focus on just how completely God has restored Job's fortunes. He has fully vindicated Job after Job's suffering, showing that Job has passed God's test by remaining faithful, even when devastated by suffering. This resolution suggests that, in the author's view, complaints and even doubts aren't antithetical to real faith—as long as a person continues seeking God, like Job did. It also shows that Job is vindicated over his friends—God forgives them for speaking falsely about him after Job prays on their behalf. Ultimately, then, God dismisses the friends' so-called comfort as being devoid of wisdom, while Job's persistent faith is celebrated as exemplary.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

A man named Job lived in the land of Uz. Job was "blameless and upright"—he honored God and resisted evil. Job had seven sons and three daughters, as well as huge flocks of livestock and lots of servants. He was considered "the greatest of all the people of the east." Job's sons often feasted in one another's houses. After the feasts, Job would always offer burnt offerings on his children's behalf, reasoning that they might have "cursed God in their hearts."

The Book of Job opens with a prologue introducing Job's exemplary character and, later, his afflictions. The setting—an ancient, foreign land with overflowing riches—give the story a folktale atmosphere, hinting that the story is going to address moral questions. More importantly, Job's prosperity and piety (his reverence towards God) represent what the Old Testament views as an ideal life. The precise location of Uz is uncertain, but it might have been within the land of Edom (southeast of the land of Israel) or even further south, on the Arabian peninsula. Although Job doesn't live within the land of Israel, he worships Israel's God, and he is zealous about it, even atoning for his children's hypothetical sins by offering sacrifices. This passage prepares its audience for the rest of the book by establishing that Job is undoubtedly a good person, no matter how others later try to contest this fact.

One day, Satan comes before the Lord. The Lord asks Satan what he's been up to, and Satan reports that he's been wandering the earth. The Lord asks Satan if he's considered "my servant Job." After all, there is nobody else like Job on earth—a "blameless and upright" worshiper of God. Satan replies, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" He points out that God has "put a fence" around Job and all that belongs to him. But if God touches Job's belongings now, Satan argues, Job will "curse you to your face." The Lord agrees that everything of Job's is now under Satan's power, but that Satan must not harm Job himself. So, Satan leaves God's presence.

The prologue alternates between scenes on earth and in heaven. Here, the prologue introduces a conflict between God and Satan. However, the two figures aren't presented as possessing equal power—God is clearly in charge, and Satan can only harm Job with God's express permission. Given that Satan disappears from the story fairly quickly, it's notable that though he is the figure who directly causes Job's coming trials, he ultimately isn't very important to Job's life or, the book implies, to readers' lives—when a person encounters suffering, it's God, not Satan, they ultimately have to deal with. By calling Job his "servant," God confirms that Job really is praiseworthy and blameless. Also, in the Book of Job, "Satan" isn't a personal name for the devil, the way it becomes used in later religious literature; the Hebrew is ha-satan, *which just means "the adversary" or "the accuser." Though Satan doesn't seem to be a total stranger in God's presence—his sudden appearance in heaven isn't resisted—he does have an adversarial stance toward God, as when he argues that Job only superficially serves God because God gives him good things.*

One day, while Job's children are feasting at the eldest brother's house, a messenger comes to Job and tells him that the Sabeans have carried away Job's oxen and donkeys; they have also killed his servants with the sword. Before the messenger has even finished speaking, another messenger comes up and tells Job that fire fell from heaven and consumed his sheep and servants. Then, yet another messenger interrupts with the news that a Chaldean raid has carried off his camel herds and killed his servants. Finally, a fourth messenger arrives and says that while Job's children were feasting at the eldest son's house, a massive desert wind blew in, collapsing the house and crushing Job's children to death.

This section is what's known as Job's first test. Presumably at Satan's instigation, Job is struck by a series of catastrophes. The disasters come from all directions: the Sabeans were a people from the south of Uz and the Chaldeans from the north; a fire comes from heaven, and the wind from the east. Piled on top of one another, the tragedies occur in shocking, relentless succession, destroying everything that had earlier marked Job as a righteous and rightfully blessed person: his livestock and his children.

When Job hears this, he gets up, tears his robe, shaves his head, and falls to the ground in worship. He says, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this, Job does nothing wrong, and he doesn't accuse God of wrong, either.

Tearing one's clothes and shaving one's head were gestures of mourning in the ancient Near East. Job's words mean that no matter what God gives or takes away from a person, God should still be worshiped, even in the midst of heartbreak. Job's worshipful attitude is what the book regards as exemplary for a faithful sufferer. Moreover, Job's actions are the opposite of what Satan predicted would happen—instead of cursing God when struck with disaster, Job worships God. The Bible praises this behavior.

CHAPTER 2

One day, the heavenly beings assemble before God, and Satan joins them. The LORD asks Satan what he's been up to, and Satan says he's been wandering the earth. The LORD again asks Satan if he's considered Job who, despite Satan's incitement against him, maintains his integrity. Satan replies that people will give up anything to save their own lives. He tells God to touch Job's own body, and then Job will surely "curse you to your face." God agrees to do this.

This second part of the prologue closely follows the structure of the first, starting with a gathering in heaven that Satan intrudes on; it's unclear how much time has passed. God points out that despite Satan's best efforts, Job did not curse God after all. So Satan proposes taking things a step further by causing Job to suffer physically—in his own body, not just through the loss of things dear to him—and God again permits Satan to do this. This is Job's second test.

Satan afflicts Job with horrible sores all over his body. Job sits in ashes and scrapes his sores with a pottery shard. Then his wife asks Job if he's still maintaining his integrity—it would be better for him to "Curse God, and die." But Job tells her that this is a foolish thing to say, and that people must receive both good things and bad from God's hand. In all this, Job doesn't sin.

When Job rejects his wife's suggestion—which, given the severity of Job's suffering, seems rather understandable—it shows that Job is a model of faithfulness in suffering: he refuses to curse God as if God has no right to deal with Job as he sees fit. By cursing God, Job would be acting like he knows better than God. Instead, Job continues to worship God, a point that will be important to keep in mind going forward. It's also the case that Job's wife essentially sides with Satan here (wanting Job to curse God) and fails to agree with God (that Job's faithful worship is praiseworthy), making her a foil for Job. Also note that this is actually Satan's last appearance in the whole book. This again underscores the idea that even though Satan is the being who directly afflicts Job, he's more just an instrument for God's testing of Job; he isn't really that important himself.

When they hear about Job's sufferings, three of Job's friends come to visit—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. Their plan is to comfort Job. As they approach Job, they start weeping, tearing their robes, and throwing dust on themselves because Job's appearance has changed so much. They spend the next seven days and nights sitting with Job in silence, seeing how terrible his suffering is.

Three newcomers enter the scene. Their silence adds to the drama of the passage, and it also contrasts with the rest of the book, which will be taken up by lots *of discussion in a series of speeches. The friends' names reveal that they come from southern locations—Teman, Shuah, and Naamah are all names associated with locations in the land of Edom (southeast of Israel) or on the Arabian peninsula. The word "comfort" will become a key in the book. Right now, it's used in a straightforward manner, as the friends want to support their stricken friend.*

CHAPTER 3

After those seven days have passed, Job finally speaks—he curses the day he was born. He laments that he didn't die at birth, and that he wasn't stillborn. If he had been, he would now be at rest in the grave, along with all others, both small and great, who have died. Job wonders why the miserable, who long for death, are nevertheless granted life. His sighing is like bread, and his groanings are like water. He has no peace.

From the prologue's prose narrative, the book now moves into poetry, which will take up the whole central section. The poetry opens with Job's anguished outburst as he stops silently enduring his suffering, doing what he'd earlier refused to do—resist God. He particularly questions the justice of being allowed to live when life is nothing but constant suffering (signified by the idea that he eats and drinks suffering).

CHAPTER 4

Then Eliphaz the Temanite speaks up. Eliphaz points out that in the past, Job has taught and encouraged many people. But now that suffering has touched *his* life, Job is impatient. Shouldn't he keep fearing God and maintaining his integrity? Eliphaz says that no innocent person has ever been afflicted by God. Rather, those who "plow iniquity / and sow trouble" reap iniquity and trouble. God's anger destroys them.

This chapter begins Job's dialogue with his three friends, which alternates between speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar and Job's responses—two full cycles of such speeches, followed by a shortened third cycle. Though Eliphaz opens his first speech by complimenting Job, he moves quickly into criticism, using an argument that will recur again and again throughout the book: that God doesn't make innocent people suffer (therefore, since he's suffering, Job must *be guilty somehow). Eliphaz also implies that his proverb—that if a person "[sows] trouble," that person will reap trouble, too—straightforwardly applies to every situation without exception. With this, he implies that just looking at a person's situation reveals the full story about their good or bad fortune.*

Eliphaz goes on to describe a frightening "spirit" he saw in a nighttime vision. The vision spoke and asked if human beings can ever be perfect before God. In answer, the spirit said that even angels are imperfect; therefore, those "who live in houses of clay, / whose foundation is in the dust," must be all the more imperfect. Day by day, foolish mortals perish forever.

Eliphaz appeals to some sort of heavenly vision as if to give his views divine support. The vision, which upholds the idea that no created being (least of all humans, whom the Bible elsewhere describes as having been made by God from "dust") is perfect in God's sight. It's essentially a rebuke of Job for arguing his innocence before God; no mortal is justified in doing that, Eliphaz counters.

CHAPTER 5

Eliphaz continues speaking, saying that distress and envy kill a person. The children of fools are crushed, with nobody to deliver them. Misery and trouble aren't grown from the earth, but "human beings are born to trouble / just as sparks fly upward." Because of all this, Eliphaz advises Job to seek God. God sends rain on the earth and takes care of the suffering; God thwarts the schemes of those who try to deceive others. However, God spares the poor and needy from injustice.

Eliphaz encourages Job to turn away from his wrongdoing (whatever it might be) and seek God; if he does, then God will reverse Job's fortunes. Eliphaz continues to argue as though good things always *happen to good people (and vice versa), as naturally as God sends rain on the land—put another way, it's just how things work. This is also reflected in his proverb-like statement that trouble doesn't just spring up from the ground, but develops after a person is born. Presumably, if trouble befalls a person, they've done something to bring it about.*

The person who's disciplined by God should be happy. Whenever God wounds a person, he also heals them. He redeems people from famine, war, and even wild animals. He blesses them with many descendants and grants them old age. These things are true; Eliphaz encourages Job to believe them for himself.

Eliphaz wraps up his first speech by arguing that suffering is a good thing—it shows that God is punishing a person for their wrongdoing, which means they can learn from it and accordingly change their ways. It's part of the way God "redeems" people and thereafter blesses the redeemed with good things. If only Job himself will believe this, Eliphaz insists, then Job will enjoy the same blessing.

CHAPTER 6

Job replies to Eliphaz. He complains that if his calamities were weighed on a scale, they would be heavier than the sand of the sea. God's poisoned arrows have struck him. He longs for God to grant him his desire—to let him die. Only this could comfort him. What is the point in his continuing to live?

Eliphaz has just told Job that if a person suffers, it's because they've done something to deserve it. Job responds by rehashing the severity of his sufferings at God's hand. They're so bad that he would rather be dead. There's even a slight self-pitying note here. Overall, though, Job suggests that his suffering is so great that Eliphaz's explanations are worthless, not even deserving of a direct reply.

Job continues that those who withhold kindness from a friend do not respect God. He says that his friends are "treacherous," like a raging stream. They disappear when things become difficult. They fear Job's calamity, though it's not as if Job has asked them for help. Job tells his friends to help him understand what he's done wrong. Why are they scolding him? He has not lied to them.

Job shifts from his first-person complaint to directly addressing his friends, attacking them for the poor consolation they've offered him. Even if they think they're helping him, their so-called wisdom is effectively canceled out by their failure to show kindness to Job. When he calls his friends "treacherous," Job compares them to desert wadis (streambeds) that flood during the rainy season while remaining parched and dry during the hot summers—implying that his friends aren't capable of giving him suitable refreshment when he needs it most.

CHAPTER 7

Job continues, saying that human life is hard and filled with labor. Job has nothing to look forward to but further misery. His nights are sleepless, and his days are swift and hopeless. Life is as short as a breath, and when someone dies and goes to Sheol, they never return.

Job continues his response to Eliphaz's speech. After his loss and suffering, he doesn't find life worth living. He also doesn't seem to anticipate life after death, at least not in a comforting form. Sheol is the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. It's sometimes a poetic way of simply referring to the grave, other times a name for the dim realm where wicked souls reside after death. Whichever way the term is intended here, it's not a cheerful place—or one from which a person hopes to return.

Because of all this, Job won't hold back his words—he will express his "anguish" and "bitterness." He feels like "the Sea, or the Dragon," being guarded by God. When he tries to sleep, God sends nightmares. Job would rather be strangled to death than continue to live this way. Why does God treat human beings like this, visiting them daily and constantly testing them? Won't he look away long enough for Job to swallow his spit? Why does God treat him this way?

In ancient Near Eastern literature, the sea is often associated with chaos, so a sea monster or "dragon" from the sea would be especially threatening. Job feels that God is watching him so closely it's as if he is one of these dangerous creatures, something God sees as needing constant, watchful supervision. Indeed, God's presence looms over Job's life constantly—Job feels like he can't even swallow. For Job, God is much too close for comfort.

CHAPTER 8

Next, Bildad the Shuhite speaks up. He asks Job how long he'll continue talking like this, his words "a great wind." Does God ever pervert justice or fail to do what's right? He tells Job that if Job seeks God and is innocent, then surely God will restore Job to his rightful place, making the rest of his life better than the beginning.

Bildad begins his first speech. Unlike Eliphaz, he doesn't hesitate to criticize Job right from the start. He basically accuses Job of just blowing hot air and doubting God's justice. Like Eliphaz, he thinks Job's situation is ultimately a simple matter: if Job is truly innocent in God's sight, then things will turn out fine for him.

Bildad tells Job that he should consider the wisdom of past generations. Papyrus can't grow without a marsh, and reeds can't grow without water—otherwise, they will wither. It's the same with the lives of those who forget God—their hope fails, and their confidence is like a spiderweb. God would never reject someone who is blameless. If Job is righteous, God will still grant Job laughter and joy, and Job's enemies will be shamed.

Bildad continues to urge Job to look to traditional wisdom for answers. Even nature shows how these things work—people who don't look to God will not thrive, just as fragile plants can't survive without water. Bildad implies that this is why Job is suffering. Again, it's not that the conventional wisdom he cites is absolutely wrong; but Bildad assumes that it can be applied to Job's life like a tidy formula.

CHAPTER 9

Job answers Bildad. He doesn't disagree, yet how can a human being be considered righteous by God? God is wise and irresistibly mighty. He can move mountains, shaking the earth's foundations. He can stop the sun from rising. He placed the constellations in the sky. No one can see God, stop him, or question him.

When Job answers Bildad, he basically agrees with his friend's point that God is just, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. The difficulty is that God is so unimaginably great that no mortal creature can measure up to him or even approach him.

God will not restrain his anger, Job continues. So how can Job presume to answer him, even if he is innocent? He doesn't believe that God would listen. God crushes Job without reason, and he won't let Job catch his breath. Job continues to maintain that he is innocent, but he doesn't think this would make a difference to God; God destroys the innocent and guilty alike.

Though Job continues to maintain his innocence, he despairs of ever getting through to God to state his case. From Job's perspective, God is too distant and too mighty to listen to mortals like him, and anyway, it looks like God causes everyone to suffer—regardless of whether they deserve it.

When Job tries to tell himself to cheer up, he nevertheless fears God's condemnation. What is the point of arguing with him? God isn't mortal, and Job can't take him to court. There's no "umpire" between them. If only God would withdraw his anger from Job, then Job could speak freely and prove his innocence.

Job expresses the desire for an intermediary between himself and God. This desire also underscores the fact that Job's friends have already proven they're not up to that role, since they've chosen to berate Job instead of supporting him. Again, God feels both too close (his anger overshadowing Job) and too far away to reach.

CHAPTER 10

Job continues his complaint—he hates his life. He wants to ask God why God finds it good to oppress him, seemingly siding with the wicked. Does he see the way human beings do? Is that why God searches for Job's sin, even though he knows Job is innocent and helpless? God created Job; will he now return Job to dust? He gave Job life and preserved him. Yet now he hunts Job like a lion and oppresses him. Why did he bother letting Job see the light of day? Job asks God to leave him alone, so that he can find a little comfort before he goes into the grave forever.

Here Job's complaint fastens onto the idea that it's unjust for God, the creator, to create him if all he's going to do is destroy Job. In other words, he's arguing with God on the basis of what he understands to be God's nature as creator of human beings. This is arguably an expression of faith in the midst of suffering—after all, Job bothers to question God instead of simply turning his back on him. His questioning suggests that, on some level, he maintains faith in God, even if he's dismayed by God's ways.

CHAPTER 11

Next, Zophar the Naamathite speaks. He asks if Job's "babble" should go unanswered. Sure, Job claims he is innocent. But if God spoke, then Job would know the whole story. God actually punishes Job less harshly than Job deserves.

Beginning his first speech, Zophar doubles down on Job's supposed sinfulness even more harshly than Bildad did. His word choice, like dismissing the earlier arguments as "babble," suggests that tempers are rising among the disputants.

Can Job discern God's wisdom? It is higher than heaven and deeper than Sheol, longer than the earth and broader than the sea. Who can hinder God's judgment? Zophar tells Job that if he directs his heart the right way, he will reach out to God and abandon wickedness. Then he'll be blameless and have nothing to fear. Misery will be just a memory. It's the wicked who have no hope of escape and want to die of misery.

Though Job has been arguing for his innocence in conduct, Zophar seems to be focusing more on the correctness of Job's beliefs—that is, he accuses Job of presumptuously believing God is treating him unjustly, which God doesn't do to anyone. Ironically, though, Zophar assumes that it's "wisdom" to associate suffering with wrongdoing in all cases, a stance that will be challenged later on. The poetic language of being "higher than heaven and deeper than Sheol" means that God's wisdom is greater than the whole universe.

CHAPTER 12

Job says that no doubt wisdom will die along with Zophar. However, *he* understands things, too. Though he used to be considered just and blameless, someone with insight from God, he's now a laughingstock. He complains that robbers and people who provoke God enjoy peace.

Job replies to Zophar with notable sarcasm, snidely undercutting his friend's declarations about so-called wisdom. This gets to the heart of the friends' conflict: they stubbornly insist that Job must be guilty of wrongdoing; at the same time, Job is upset that his friends aren't addressing what he sees as the core issue—that when he looks at his own experience, he sees a world in which good people suffer for no apparent reason, while the guilty prosper. This is the longest of Job's responses to his friends in the book, pointing to his growing frustration with them.

But everyone—even animals, birds, and fish—knows that it's God who does this—all living things, including the breath of every human, is in God's hand. God has wisdom and strength, and what he tears down, nobody can rebuild. Both "deceived and deceiver" belong to him. He even "makes fools of judges," "overthrows the mighty," and "pours contempt on princes." God both establishes and destroys nations. He takes away light from leaders, so that they stagger around as if drunk.

In this section, Job broadly describes God's providence—his oversight and care of all of creation. With this broad scope—from the natural world to the heights of human power—Job implies that his friends take too narrow a view of God. While they correctly assert God's wisdom and justice, they also assume that they understand how those divine attributes apply in all situations. Job suggests that his friends understand less than they assume.

CHAPTER 13

Job says he is not inferior to Zophar; he knows everything his friend knows. It's God Job wants to speak to—even to "argue his case" with. Job accuses his friends of being liars and "worthless physicians." They would be wiser if they kept silent! He tells them to listen to his reasoning. Will they presume to speak falsely on God's behalf, assuming God won't discover it? His friends' claims are "proverbs of ashes."

Job continues his self-defense speech against Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. He begins by continuing to criticize his friends' poor counsel—quite harshly at that. He claims they've misdiagnosed his problem ("worthless physicians") and, worse, they've spoken falsely of God. Their claims, then, are worthless, crumbling like ash.

Job calls for silence so that he can speak, no matter what happens to him as a result. Even if God kills him, he will defend himself before God. He knows he'll be vindicated in the end. But first, he prays, begging God to "withdraw his hand" and stop terrifying him. He asks God to tell him his sin. Why does God hide his face from Job and treat him like an enemy? Will he continue to frighten Job like a "windblown leaf?"

Here Job moves from accusing his friends to directly addressing God, in a lengthy prayer that spans the next chapter and a half. He boldly appeals to God for the chance to defend himself and to understand what God holds against him. Job fears God, yet he doesn't shrink from confrontation by God—suggesting that, in the end, Job is motivated by trust in God. In fact, he even accepts that death at God's hand is preferable to keeping silent, because he believes that God will somehow make things right, as long as Job maintains his integrity.

CHAPTER 14

Job continues to pray. He observes that mortals live few days and that their lives are filled with trouble; they wither like a flower. Given that their lives are brief, and that God has determined the number of their days, God should look away from humans so that they can enjoy what little time they have. Unlike trees, which can send out fresh shoots even after being cut down, human beings do not rise again.

Job continues his response to his friends in the form of a plea to God. In this section, he shifts from focusing on his own situation to focusing on humanity's situation more generally. Human life is incredibly short, and there's no second chance to live one's life; Job feels that God overshadows human lives in a crushing way and should give people a break.

Job wishes that God would just hide him in Sheol for a while, until God's wrath has been exhausted. Then Job would wait until God called for him, knowing that God would no longer pay attention to his sins. Job then compares mortal hopes to a mountain that God has caused to be worn down until it crumbles away.

Job speaks poetically here. Sheol is the dwelling of the dead, and Job doesn't mean that he wants God to literally put him in the grave for a period of time (that wouldn't accord with his beliefs about death, from which no one returns). Rather, he just means that he'd endure just about anything if it means he could gain justice and mercy from God. For now, though, Job remains dejected—the suffering God allows causes his hope to disintegrate.

CHAPTER 15

Eliphaz the Temanite speaks up in reply. He asks if the wise should answer with "windy knowledge," using worthless words. He accuses Job of neglecting the fear of God—Job's own words condemn him. Is Job, Eliphaz asks, the firstborn of humanity? Does he think he is the only wise person? Is he dissatisfied with God's teachings? No human being can be righteous; even the heavens are unclean compared to God. How much more is this the case for a sinner?

The second cycle of speeches begins here. If the first cycle established the participants' positions, the second round of debate entrenches those positions. Eliphaz continues building his argument that Job doesn't fear God enough. He keeps accusing Job of arrogance and impiety, assuming that Job believes in his own wisdom and righteousness instead of seeing himself as a sinner before God.

Eliphaz continues that *he* will tell Job wisdom. The wicked suffer all their lives, constantly threatened by famine and violence. This is the consequence of defying God. The wicked's wealth won't last, and their lives will have nothing to show but evil.

Again, Eliphaz interprets human suffering as a straightforward cause and effect—the wicked suffer terrible things. Therefore, Eliphaz assumes that Job's sufferings are the result of Job's wrongdoing.

CHAPTER 16

Job answers and says that he's heard all this before; his friends are "miserable comforters." As for Job himself, whether he speaks or remains silent, his pain remains. God has mercilessly abandoned Job to the wicked and ungodly, even though Job's hands and his prayers are innocent. Job calls out for a heavenly witness to vouch for him.

Job repeats the fact that his friends are really bad at this—he uses "comforters" sarcastically, since they're actually deepening his distress, not relieving it. Job also attributes his undeserved sufferings to God's doing—and yet, at the same time, he seems to hope that God will somehow vindicate him. The logic is that if God is the one with the power to make Job suffer, he also has the wisdom to see the truth about Job and the power to someday, somehow, set things right. After all, Job's friends have failed him, so where else can he turn?

CHAPTER 17

Continuing his complaint, Job says that his spirit is broken. He seeks someone who will "give surety" for him. People spit at the sight of Job, and upright people are appalled at his plight. Job addresses his friends and asks where he can find hope, if Sheol is to be his dwelling.

Job looks for someone who will give "surety" for him, or vouch for his innocence—a person who seems difficult to find. When Job addresses his friends, he insists again that their *perspectives don't offer him true hope, because they don't reflect the truth about his situation. Again, too, Job points out the fact that Sheol isn't a hopeful place—someone who goes to the realm of the dead doesn't expect to return.*

CHAPTER 18

Next Bildad speaks. He asks Job how long he's going to keep talking—does he think they're stupid? The wicked don't thrive, and they fall into their own traps. The wicked are consumed by disease, their homes are destroyed, and they have no offspring to remember them. Surely this is what happens to the ungodly and to those who don't know God.

In his second speech, Bildad reiterates his claims from his first speech about the fate of the wicked, sounding increasingly frustrated with Job. His implication, clearly, is that Job is one of the wicked and ungodly people, whose lives and legacies are destroyed.

CHAPTER 19

Job asks his friends how long they'll continue to torment him with their destructive words. Aren't they ashamed to do him wrong? If Job's words have been false, then that's his affair; but in any case, Job is confident that it's God who has wronged him. Even when Job calls on God for help, God continues to treat Job like an enemy.

Job suggests that his friends are actively harming him with their so-called comfort. And as he's stated elsewhere, it's not human beings' judgment that Job is mainly concerned about, but God's. However, God still seems to remain aloof from Job and even hostile.

Job's family and friends have rejected him. Even his servants regard him as a stranger, and his wife and family find him abhorrent. He begs his friends to have pity on him and stop pursuing him to death like God does. Job wishes that his words could be written down, even engraved on a rock.

This passage connects back to the prologue, when Job's wife seemed disgusted by Job's refusal to curse God. Now Job has been abandoned by his entire social circle, whose "help" feels like persecution. Job is so certain that he's right that he wishes his self-defense could be recorded for posterity somehow.

Job knows that his Redeemer lives, and that in the end, his Redeemer will be seen on earth. Even after Job's flesh has been destroyed, he believes he will see God on his side. He warns his friends that a judgment is coming.

This is one of the book's most famous passages. Normally, in Job's context, a "redeemer" would be a next of kin who would vouch for a person. This is one possible interpretation of Job's statement. However, the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible also frequently calls God the "Redeemer" of individuals and of Israel. Job's specific statement that he expects to see God defending him even after his death lends support to the idea (popular in later interpretation) that Job trusts in a divine vindicator, not just a human one.

CHAPTER 20

Zophar speaks up again. He feels agitated and insulted, so he can't help himself. He argues that ever since human beings first appeared on earth, the wicked and godless have had little joy. Their lives are short, and their children don't prosper. Because of their wickedness to the poor, they don't enjoy profit for long. Due to their greed, they will soon be poor and miserable themselves. They have nothing but violence and terror to look forward to. In the end, their wickedness will be revealed, as decreed by God.

In his second speech, Zophar is having none of Job's claims of innocence. As in his first speech, he inflexibly maintains that wicked people always end up suffering for their misdeeds—with the implication that this is why Job suffers, too. Again, Zophar upholds a standard of human wisdom which he implies is the same as God's standard.

CHAPTER 21

Then Job answers, urging Zophar to listen to him before he mocks any further; he will offer his friend "consolation." He tells his friend to look at him and "lay your hand upon your mouth." Job himself is filled with dismay. He wonders why the wicked live long lives and have many children, and why their households live without fear. Their children dance and celebrate, and the wicked descend to Sheol in peace.

Job closes the second cycle of speeches with his reply to Zophar. In Job's reply, he mockingly refers to "consolation" in order to disparage his friends' so-called comfort of him. He tells Zophar to keep quiet. He then argues that, actually, reality is the opposite of what Zophar says—far from suffering condemnation for their actions, the wicked actually thrive, *living and dying happily and in stark contrast to their treatment of others.*

In fact, Job continues, the wicked even tell God to leave them alone, because they don't want to know his ways. Serving God won't profit them. How often, Job wonders, do the wicked actually suffer God's wrath? Zophar claims that God stores up their wickedness so that their children will suffer—but why shouldn't they suffer for themselves?

Job continues to rebut Zophar's claims that the wicked suffer, arguing that the wicked brazenly disregard God and only look out for their own happiness. Contrary to Zophar's claims, too, it isn't just for the descendants of the wicked to suffer—the wicked themselves should be punished for their own misdeeds.

Job continues to insist that the wicked "are spared in the day of calamity" and that even when they die, they are buried with honor. In light of all this, how can Zophar "comfort [him] with empty nothings?" His claims are simply lies.

Job doesn't just reject Zophar's "empty" speech but also complains of God's seeming injustice. It appears to be untrue that the wicked suffer for what they've done. Instead, they enjoy rewards, while righteous people (like Job) suffer instead.

CHAPTER 22

Next, Eliphaz the Temanite speaks up. He asks Job if even the wisest person can be of service to God. Does human righteousness bring God any pleasure? Anyway, is God rebuking Job because of his goodness? Rather, it's because of Job's *wickedness*. Job has stripped clothing from the naked, denied water to the weary, and refused to give bread to the hungry. He's been cruel to widows and orphans. *This* is why Job is surrounded by snares and terrors.

Eliphaz makes his third and final speech, and he takes things up a notch—blatantly accusing Job of the basest wickedness. He accuses Job of being cruel to society's most helpless, contradicting Job's protests that he is righteous (which are supported by the book's prologue). It's because of all this, Eliphaz claims, that Job has suffered so much.

God is in the heavens, Eliphaz points out, beyond the highest stars—so Job probably assumes that God can't see him and won't judge him. Will Job insist on following the path of the wicked, who were taken from the earth prematurely? Such people told God to "leave them alone." The righteous rejoice at their destruction.

Eliphaz shows that he hasn't really been listening to Job's arguments on his own behalf. He portrays Job as someone who actively defies God. In doing so, Eliphaz takes Job's words from chapter 21—where Job describes the wicked as those who totally disregard God—out of context, saying this is Job's attitude about God (which it clearly isn't).

Eliphaz urges Job to "agree with God, and be at peace." If he does this, spurning **gold** and regarding God as his "gold and [...] precious silver" instead, God will restore goodness to Job's life. God will then hear and answer Job's prayers.

Eliphaz appeals to Job to treat God like life's greatest treasure, more valuable than precious metals. If Job regards God as his greatest wealth (implying that Job has been hoarding earthly wealth instead), then Job will be at peace with God. Eliphaz's appeal is, of course, an insult to Job who, though rich, was portrayed earlier as righteous in his dealings with God and with other people.

CHAPTER 23

Job answers and says that he has a bitter complaint—God's hand is heavy upon him. He wishes he knew where to find God, so he could go to God's house and plead his case. Then God would listen to Job's arguments and acquit him.

In his response to Eliphaz, Job no longer seems to care about answering his friends' unjust accusations. At this point, he wishes he could confront God directly. He is so confident in his innocence that he believes God would acquit him—also an expression of Job's faith in God's just character.

However, no matter where Job goes—forward or backward, left or right—he cannot find God. At the same time, God knows Job's path, and Job knows that when God has tested him, he will emerge "like **gold**." Job has never abandoned God's commandments and treasures God's word in his heart.

Job doesn't believe that he could literally find God in a physical location, but he speaks poetically of the fact that God seems totally beyond Job's reach. And yet, at the same time, Job trusts that even though he can't find God, God knows where he *is and will treat Job justly. He understands that God is testing him in order to purify him.*

At the same time, Job knows that God does whatever he wants. Accordingly, God will also fulfill his plans for Job. When Job thinks about this, it scares him. He wishes he could vanish into thick darkness so he could hide from God.

Even though Job has faith in God, that doesn't mean the implications of trusting God aren't scary. As a small, limited human being, Job doesn't know what God intends for him, and the uncertainty and fear still make him wary of God.

CHAPTER 24

Job continues, wondering why God does not seem to be around at the right times. The wicked seize flocks; they take the livestock of the widow and orphan. The wicked push the needy out of the way, forcing them to scavenge for survival and seek shelter in the wilderness. The dying and wounded call to God for help, but he doesn't answer.

Job continues to lament the fact that it seems like God doesn't *punish the wicked and, in fact, that God allows the vulnerable to suffer at the hands of the wicked. If one simply looks at the world, it appears as if God ignores or overlooks suffering. Just because Job trusts God, that doesn't mean he understands all of God's ways.*

Some people rebel against the "light," like the murderer who kills and thieves in the night, or the adulterer who waits for evening so his actions will be hidden. Such people befriend darkness, and Sheol claims such sinners. Even if God seems to sustain them for a little while, they will ultimately be cut off.

Even though it seems to Job like God isn't around when he's needed most, and that he even lets evildoers get away with awful things, Job ultimately believes that justice prevails; people who sin against God end up in Sheol, as is just.

CHAPTER 25

Next, Bildad the Shuhite speaks. He says that dominion belongs to God, God's armies are innumerable, and his light shines on everyone. With all that said, how can a mortal be righteous in God's sight? If even the stars aren't pure, then a human being, who's like a worm, certainly cannot be.

This is the last speech given by one of Job's friends. As the friends have kept talking, it's become increasingly clear that they aren't really listening to what Job says in his own defense—they're listening to themselves talk more than anything, and Job and his friends have grown more and more distant from each other as a result. Here, Bildad repeats the point that nobody is perfect in God's sight. While this may be true, and Job wouldn't dispute it, it also doesn't address Job's current situation.

CHAPTER 26

Job interrupts Bildad with sarcasm. How helpful his friends have been, he says, to a powerless one like himself! What good advice they've given him!

Bildad doesn't get a chance to finish his speech because Job cuts him short, beginning his own speech which will last for the next several chapters. Job is out of patience, so he sarcastically complains that his friends have done him no good all this time. Instead of grieving with him in his suffering, they've made his pain more intolerable by blaming Job for his own suffering. Such an approach, while it might sometimes contain truth (i.e., sometimes people are *responsible for their suffering) does nothing to actually help those who are in trouble.*

The shades (the dead) and the waters beneath the earth tremble. Sheol is plainly visible to God, who "hangs the earth upon nothing," collects water in the clouds, and establishes a boundary between light and dark. He makes the pillars of heaven shake, and he stills the sea with his power. He "pierces[] the fleeing serpent." Job describes these things as just "the outskirts" of God's ways, as no one can understand "the thunder of his power."

Job goes on to describe some of the mysteries of God's ways. God is responsible for holding together the entire visible universe, and he even sees the dead. By listing these things, Job underlines his argument that his friends don't really understand God's ways whatsoever and should be much less confident in their claims. His reference to the seas and the "serpent" evoke the idea, common in ancient Near Eastern writings, of subduing cosmic chaos and creating order.

CHAPTER 27

Job speaks again and says that as long as God (who has embittered his soul) lives, and as long as there's breath in Job's nostrils, he won't say anything false. Until he dies, he won't throw away his integrity.

Job continues his speech by insisting that he will continue to uphold his innocence—he won't speak falsely by agreeing with his friends that his sufferings are the result of his sin. When he cites his "integrity," he actually agrees with God's evaluation of Job in the book's prologue.

Job tells his friends he will teach them about the Almighty's ways. (His friends have seen God's hand for themselves, so why do they speak vainly?) When wicked and oppressive people bear children, those offspring are destined to starve or be killed by the sword. Survivors die of disease, and no one mourns them. Even if they accumulate riches, the innocent will enjoy these things. Terrors like floods and **whirlwinds** stalk their lives.

Job turns the tables on his friends by undertaking to inform them about God's ways. Contradicting the idea floated by his friends that it's always obvious when somebody is a sinner, Job argues that often it's not obvious until after a wicked person dies, like when their children suffer, or when their riches wind up in other hands.

CHAPTER 28

Miners dig precious metals out of the depths of the earth, Job continues, far away from other people. Even though they unearth precious things, they cannot find wisdom and understanding. No mortal, in fact, knows the way to wisdom, and they can't buy it with **gold** or silver. So where does it come from?

In the first part of his dialogue responding to his friends, Job focused on the universe's hidden mysteries. Now, he builds on that theme by exploring the idea of wisdom itself as hidden. He uses the poetic image of wisdom as a precious substance hidden so deep that even miners can't dig it up.

Only God knows where wisdom can be found. In fact, he sees everything under the heavens. He gave the wind its weight, portioned out the waters, and established the weather. God also said to humanity, "the fear of the Lord [...] is wisdom."

Job concludes this part of his dialogue by making it clear that only God knows where to find wisdom, and that the balance and beauty of the universe provide evidence of this fact. For humans, wisdom consists in seeking and revering God.

CHAPTER 29

Job speaks again, wishing he were once again in his prime, when God was his friend, and he was surrounded by his children. In those days, Job would sit at the city gates, and youthful and aged men alike would show Job respect. Even princes fell silent in his presence. Job helped the poor and wretched, and he was "clothed" with righteousness and justice. Because of these things, Job felt confident that he would live long and die peacefully. His counsel was revered, and everyone looked to him like a chief.

Job's speech turns personal again as he grieves for the honorable life he once enjoyed. In the past, Job felt certain that God was present in his life—even intimately, like a friend—and his life reflected the blessings that would be expected for a righteous person, like public honor. Out of his abundance, Job generously helped the needy. With this remembrance, Job defends himself against his friends' accusations of sin and also presents himself as a model of a righteous life duly rewarded by God.

CHAPTER 30

But now, Job continues, younger men mock him—pitiful outcasts whom the land has rejected. Yet to such men, Job has become a "byword" because of the way God has humbled him. The masses pursue him, eager for his ruin.

Job shifts to his plight in the present. It's a total reversal of his life in the past—far from being honored, he's mocked and humiliated by those who once looked up to him. Instead of flocking to him for advice, people join forces to destroy him.

Job is racked with relentless pain. He feels that God has thrown him to the ground and that he has become like "dust and ashes." When Job cries to God, God doesn't answer; it's as if God just stands and looks at him. God has turned cruel to Job, and Job knows that God will bring him to death.

In contrast to the days when he felt that God was a nearby friend, now Job feels abandoned by God. He receives the opposite of blessing from God now—only pain, dishonor, silence, and the threat of death. Still, Job doesn't stop calling out to God for help, suggesting his faith is intact, if battered.

Didn't Job himself once weep for the needy? But when Job looked for good for himself, he only found evil. He's now in turmoil, and he walks around in constant gloom. He is "a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches." His skin is decaying, his bones burn, and he can only sing mourning songs on his lyre.

Job underscores the basic injustice of his present position. Though he once showed concern for the suffering, he now receives no sympathy—he's like an animal that scavenges in the desert, unfit for human company. Where he once enjoyed riches and peace, now his body and spirit are relentlessly afflicted.

CHAPTER 31

Job goes on, saying that he's made "a covenant with [his] eyes" not to look at a virgin. If he's done anything wrong—false, deceitful, or unclean—then others should reap and enjoy whatever he's sown. If other women have enticed him, then it would be only fair if his wife had sex with another man. If Job has ever dealt unjustly with his slaves, what will he do when God judges him? After all, God created both Job and his slaves alike.

In this section, Job defends his morality. He goes out of his way to avoid lust, for example, by promising himself he won't even look at young women. He names the consequences he would rightfully suffer if he cheated on his wife or abused his slaves. (Note that while the Old Testament didn't abolish slavery, slavery in that context was practiced differently than in more modern contexts. Slaves were usually indebted people or wartime captives, the Bible required that they have opportunities for freedom, and slaveowners' treatment of enslaved people was subject to strict biblical laws.) Job's overall point is that God should deal justly with people according to their behavior—they should deserve what they get.

If Job has ever neglected the poor, the widow, or the orphan, then he should suffer terrors at God's hands. If he's put his trust in **gold**, or rejoiced in his wealth, then he should be punished. Likewise, he should be punished if he has delighted in his enemies' ruin or concealed his own wrongdoing. He wishes he had a written indictment from his adversary. If Job's "land has cried out against" him, then "let thorns grow instead of wheat, / and foul weeds instead of barley." Here, Job's words come to an end.

While Job is quite confident in his personal righteousness, he isn't bragging. He is putting things pointedly in order to argue that if he had mistreated others, put wealth before God, or anything of the kind, he would deserve what he's suffering. He would deserve to reap what he'd sown, like "thorns" and "weeds." But since he doesn't, he can do nothing but speak his case to God. And now, having made his case, he has nothing more to say.


CHAPTER 32

Job's three companions stop answering him, because Job is "righteous in his own eyes." Then, another man speaks up—Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite. Elihu is angry at Job for "justifying[] himself rather than God." He's also mad at Job's three friends for failing to give Job a satisfactory answer.

After Job finishes speaking, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar have nothing more to say—either because they're persuaded by Job or because they see that trying to change Job's mind is pointless. However, somebody else has something to say. Judging by his self-introduction, the other men don't know him; he appears to be butting in, and he has strong opinions about everybody involved.

Elihu had refrained from speaking up because the other men are older than him. But, angry at the failure of Job's friends, he finally speaks. He prefaces his statement by acknowledging that he is young, but that it's God's spirit, not one's age, that makes for wisdom. On this basis, he implores the group to listen to his opinion.

As a young man, Elihu would be expected to defer to his elders, but now that everyone has said their piece, he defends his right to speak by pointing out that God grants people wisdom regardless of age. But mostly, he comes across as an arrogant young know-it-all.

Elihu says that he's listened to the other men for a long time, but that nobody has successfully answered Job. Now that the others have fallen silent, Elihu sees no reason to keep his thoughts to himself—he is "full of words [...] ready to burst" and *must* speak. As he does, he won't show partiality or flatter anyone—indeed, he doesn't know *how* to flatter.

Elihu continues to present himself as a wellspring of objective truth, but he still comes across as a brash, meddling youth who's sure he can inject fresh insights into the conversation that has been going around and around.

CHAPTER 33

Now, Elihu tells Job to hear his speech; his words will demonstrate his uprightness. The spirit of God compels him to speak, and Job must answer him if he can. Elihu summarizes Job's claim to be sinless and unjustly persecuted by God. He then asserts that Job's argument isn't right. God, he says, is greater than mortals, and it isn't right to argue with him.

Elihu appears to think that he can add wisdom to the conversation (prompted by God's spirit, no less), which Job's friends have failed to supply. He also rather glibly dismisses Job's claims about himself and purports to solve the mystery of God's apparent silence toward Job.

Elihu continues that God speaks to humans in two special ways, though people don't usually perceive it. The first is through terrifying dreams that are meant to warn people away from their sins. The second is through the chastening of bodily pain, drawing a person's soul close to death. In such a case, if a mediator graciously prays on the person's behalf, declaring the person righteous, then God might spare the person's life. When this happens, the person will sing to others of God's redemption. Elihu concludes that these are the ways God brings people's souls back from "the Pit." He tells Job to speak if he has anything to say in response, or if not, to be silent so that Elihu can teach him wisdom.

Elihu's argument rests on the idea that suffering is God's way of communicating with people. In particular, it's God's way of rescuing a person's soul from sin, by prompting a person to recognize their wrongdoing and turn away from it. Though he doesn't explicitly say so, Elihu implies that the second scenario—bodily suffering—applies to Job, and that if Job understands what's best for him, he'll heed the message; then God will deliver him from "the Pit," or death. In saying all this, Elihu continues to sound quite presumptuous.

CHAPTER 34

Elihu continues speaking, saying that the group of men must determine among themselves what's right. Elihu says that Job "drinks up scoffing like water" and consorts with evildoers. He also says that God repays people according to their deeds and never perverts justice. Because God is in control of the whole world, if he were to "gather to himself his breath," all mortal creatures would die.

Structurally, this is Elihu's second speech, and he opens by appealing to the group at large. He accuses Job of wickedness, specifically by classing Job with "scoffers" who speak falsely about God. Because God is perfectly just, Elihu asserts, it's impossible for Job's claims of innocence to be true. But Elihu also shifts the conversation away from the matter of Job's guilt or innocence and toward God's character instead.

God's eyes, Elihu continues, are always upon mortals, and he misses nothing; evildoers can't find darkness deep enough to hide themselves in. God crushes the wicked, especially when he hears the cries of the poor whom they have oppressed. Anyone with sense will see this and acknowledge that Job is speaking without knowledge. He wishes that Job were tested to the limit, since he speaks like he's one of the wicked, adding rebellion to the sins he's already committed.

Elihu picks up on language that Job himself has already used to describe God's all-knowing power and special concern for the vulnerable. However, he follows this to the conclusion that it's Job who doesn't understand God. He even suggests that by asserting his innocence, Job is being rebellious, a greater fault than whatever else he might have done.

CHAPTER 35

Elihu continues speaking. It's not right, he says, for Job to assert his righteousness and to ask, "How am I better off than if I had sinned?" Elihu will answer him and his friends. He tells Job to observe the skies. Elihu says that neither Job's transgressions nor his righteousness actually give God anything. Rather, these things affect other human beings.

Elihu argues that Job has made a basic mistake in his attitude towards God. He says Job has been arguing that he might as well have sinned, since God has made him suffer anyway. Elihu offers a different perspective by suggesting that even if Job is righteous by human standards, it's not like that gives him special standing before a perfectly just and righteous God.

Elihu says that the oppressed cry out because of their suffering, seeking the strong's help. But nobody calls for help from God, their Maker. And when the prideful cry out, God doesn't heed them, either. How much less, then, must God heed those who arrogantly present their own case to God. Because God has not punished Job harshly, Job now speaks empty words, "multiplying[] words without knowledge."

Elihu continues arguing that when people suffer, they tend to be short-sighted, looking for help from anyone but God. Often, too, people call for help out of pride rather than humility. People don't learn the right lessons from their suffering, in other words. Job, Elihu asserts, is no different—and in fact he's worse, because he refuses to see that he needs *to learn a lesson.*

CHAPTER 36

Elihu keeps talking; he still has something to say on God's behalf. God, he says, is mighty in every way. He doesn't sustain the wicked but gives the afflicted what they deserve. If the afflicted have sinned, God instructs them accordingly, commanding them to change their ways. If they do, they will spend the rest of their days happily; if they persist in sinning, they will die by violence.

Here, Elihu's argument doesn't differ too much from those of Job's friends. He also assumes that Job's suffering is an instance of God teaching Job to change his ways. Unlike Job's friends, though, Elihu directly says that he's arguing in God's defense—again suggesting that he thinks pretty highly of himself.

The godless harbor anger and don't turn to God for help, so they die shamefully. On the other hand, God "delivers the afflicted by their affliction / and opens their ear by adversity." But Job, Elihu accuses, is obsessed with the situation of the wicked. He warns Job not to end up scoffing at God or turn to further wickedness himself—that's how he wound up where he is now.

Elihu argues that Job's suffering is an opportunity for Job to hear God speaking to him, turn from wickedness, and find God's deliverance. He warns Job that if Job keeps worrying about the fate of the wicked, Job might venture too far down the path of wickedness himself and miss God's deliverance altogether.

Elihu urges Job to praise God's work. God is great, and mortals can't fully know him; "the number of his years is unsearchable." Nobody can understand how he causes it to rain or lightning to strike. The "crashing" of thunder expresses God's anger against immorality.

Elihu describes God's greatness in overwhelming terms—God's doings, his anger, and his agelessness are beyond the human capacity to understand. All this is meant to impress upon Job that it's wrong to argue with God—no human being should presume to approach God on such footing.

CHAPTER 37

Elihu says that God's thundering voice causes his heart to tremble. God unleashes lightning across the earth, and his voice roars majestically. Nobody can understand how he causes the snow and rain to fall, sending animals into their dens. He also sends **whirlwinds** by his breath and causes the waters to freeze. "Whether for correction [...] or for love" he causes all these things to happen.

Elihu continues speaking about God's majesty, with particular attention to God's "voice" as personified in thunder, and his "breath" in the terrifying power of a whirlwind. Moreover, God's speech, his breathing, and all his actions are purposeful, even if human beings don't understand those purposes.

Elihu urges Job to stop and consider God's wonderful works. Does Job know, he asks, how God causes lightning to shine, or balances the clouds? Can Job spread out the skies like God can? He tells Job to teach the rest of them what to say to God. The Almighty, feared by mortals, doesn't listen to anyone who is wise in their own eyes.

Elihu concludes his speech by encouraging Job to think about God's incredible power—can Job explain any of the marvelous phenomena God creates? He sarcastically tells Job to teach the rest of them, then. Assuming Job can't, Elihu admonishes Job to revise his opinion of himself—he's not wise enough to argue with Almighty God.

CHAPTER 38

Then, God himself addresses Job "out of the **whirlwind**." He demands, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? / Gird up your loins like a man, / I will question you, and you shall declare to me."

Job doesn't get a chance to respond to Elihu's speeches. That's because God suddenly addresses Job directly for the first time. He does so in terrifying form, unseen yet heard through the awesome, dangerous force of the whirlwind. After all Job's questions, God says it's time for him to question Job. He dismisses Job's speech as "without knowledge" and warns him that he'd better get ready.

God continues to question Job. Where was Job, he asks, when God laid the earth's foundations? Surely Job knows the earth's measurements! Who shut the doors of the sea, telling it, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther"?

God's onslaught of questions is laced with sarcasm, as he mocks Job that surely, he must understand how God made the world. God clearly implies that Job has no idea what he's been talking about.

God keeps interrogating Job, asking him if he has walked in the sea's depths, seen the gates of death, or knows where light or darkness dwell. "Surely you know," God mocks Job, "for [...] the number of your days is great!" Who makes rain fall on the desert? Can Job "bind the chains of the Pleiades"? Who gives wisdom and understanding? Who provides prey to young lions?

God continues taunting Job with a relentless catalogue of the things Job cannot claim to understand—from the deepest ocean to the heavenly constellations. With these pointed questions, God makes the point that Job's repeated attempts to defend himself have been foolish. They've been attempts to understand divine purposes unimaginably beyond his human limitations.

CHAPTER 39

God continues asking Job if he knows when mountain goats or deer give birth to their young. Who let the wild ass go free to roam in the mountains? Did Job give the horse its might and fearlessness in battle? Is it because of Job's wisdom that the hawk soars and the eagle nests on the heights?

God's interrogation of Job is relentless. With the animal imagery, God not only reinforces the image of his power but also conveys his providence—his care for everything in creation. He made all creatures with particular designs and purposes. Job can't explain a single one of these things, much less accomplish these things himself.

CHAPTER 40

The LORD asks Job, "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?" If Job argues with God, he must give a response. Job replies that he is small; how can he answer? "I lay my hand upon my mouth," he tells God, and will speak no more.

God calls Job a "faultfinder"—meaning that Job has been finding fault with God and therefore shouldn't dare to question God. Finally given a chance to speak to God directly, Job's response is silence—he now sees that no other response is fitting.

God again speaks to Job out of the **whirlwind**, telling him to "gird up his loins like a man" and answer when he's questioned. He orders Job to "deck yourself with [...] dignity," bring low the proud, and tread upon the wicked. Only then will God acknowledge that Job can gain victory by his own hand.

God isn't done with Job yet. Next, he challenges Job to embody God's justice and power by dealing justly with the proud and wicked. If he can do that, then maybe Job is worthy to question God.

God tells Job to consider Behemoth, which God made just as he made Job. This powerful creature eats grass just like an ox. Its creation was God's first great act, and only God can control it. It lies in the shade of the lotus plant, surrounded by the willows in the wadi. It's unafraid of the turbulent River Jordan.

To further demonstrate his mysterious ways, God describes his creation of intimidating creatures that only God could come up with or control. The first is Behemoth, perhaps a hippopotamus or even a mythical beast. Again, Job's understanding is no match for the wonders of God's creation.

CHAPTER 41

Can Job draw Leviathan out with a fishhook? Can he put a rope in its nose? Can he play with it or put it on a leash for a children's pet? Indeed, he couldn't even hope to capture it; it's so fierce that nobody dares confront it. God speaks of Leviathan's "coat of mail" and terrifying teeth; "its sneezes flash forth light," and it breathes fire. No weapon—sword, spear, or javelin—can pierce it. This fearless creature is king over all lesser creatures.

Here, God continues to question Job regarding the mysteries of creation, vividly describing a mysterious dragon-like being that terrifies all other creatures, but frolics like a harmless pet for God. Like Behemoth, Leviathan's precise identity isn't certain; it could be a crocodile, or it could be a mythical beast. The bigger point is that no, Job could never catch such a creature—God alone can.

CHAPTER 42

Job answers the LORD and says he knows that God can do all these things; God's purpose can't be thwarted. He admits that he has spoken things he didn't understand—things "too wonderful" for him. He had heard of God before, but now he has seen him. Accordingly, he "despises" himself and "repents[] in dust and ashes."

After God's speech, Job returns to the worshipful attitude he had at the beginning of the book. Notably, God has not answered Job's pressing questions about his suffering. However, Job has witnessed God's "wonderful" power, which seems to preclude the need for answers. Instead, recognizing his utter smallness, Job repents of his arrogance in questioning God.

After the LORD finishes speaking to Job, he addresses Eliphaz the Temanite and says that his wrath is kindled against Eliphaz and his two friends, because unlike Job, they haven't spoken rightly about him. Therefore, he orders Eliphaz to sacrifice seven bulls and seven rams as a burnt offering; they must also ask God's servant Job to pray for them. God will accept Job's prayer that he not deal with these men "according to [their] folly." So Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar do this, and God accepts Job's prayer on their behalf.

God rebukes Job's friends for not speaking truthfully about him. While Job had to repent of his arrogance is demanding answers from God about his suffering, God implies that Job did not *speak falsely of him, while Job's friends did. This difference suggests that even if Job's friends correctly understood certain truths about God, suffering, and human behavior, they didn't apply those truths accurately to Job's situation—which essentially negated whatever theoretical wisdom they had. In turn, this suggests that from a divine perspective, there's much more to wisdom than theoretical knowledge, and by wielding such knowledge ineffectively, Job's friends have sinned. God further vindicates Job's righteousness by upholding* Job, *not his friends, as a pinnacle of righteousness to whom his friends should appeal for prayer.*

After Job prays for his friends, God restores Job's fortunes. In fact, God gives Job twice as much as he had before. All of Job's siblings and acquaintances come to visit, show sympathy, and comfort Job for all that God has put him through. God blesses the latter years of Job's life more than the beginning of his life.

God ultimately vindicates Job beyond his wildest hopes. In fact, the end of Job's life outshines the beginning, suggesting that Job passed the tests God imposed on him by refusing to turn away from God. Now, God rewards Job's faith accordingly. In contrast to their earlier rejection, Job's family now shows genuine comfort, and Job is restored to the community from which he was alienated in his suffering.

Not only does Job have 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 donkeys, but he also fathers more children: seven sons and three daughters. The daughters are named Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-happuch. They are the most beautiful women in the land, and they receive inheritances just as their brothers do. Job lives 140 years after this, seeing four generations of his offspring. Then Job dies, "old and full of days."

The vast numbers of livestock Job owns reflect how greatly God has rewarded him—the figures are exactly double those he possessed at the beginning of the book. He is also blessed with the exact numbers of sons and daughters he had before catastrophe struck—which doesn't mean that his children are replaceable, but shows that a righteous man like Job won't have his legacy wiped off the earth. Only the daughters are specifically named (respectively, their names mean "dove," "a type of perfume," and "a type of eye shadow," all probably meant to reflect their special beauty). Job is also blessed to live to an improbably advanced age—the number 140 being twice 70, which the Bible elsewhere (Psalm 90) identifies as a typical lifespan. If Job was presented as morally exemplary at the beginning of the book, he is now presented as an example of what God's richest blessing looks like.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

White, Sarah. "*Book of Job*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 28 Sep 2021. Web. 28 Sep 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

White, Sarah. "*Book of Job*." LitCharts LLC, September 28, 2021. Retrieved September 28, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/book-of-job.

To cite any of the quotes from *Book of Job* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Anonymous, Anonymous. Book of Job. Oxford University Press. 2001.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Anonymous, Anonymous. Book of Job. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001.