

Notes on Job 1—5

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Chapters 1 and 2

This neatly styled story is not interested in how so much could happen to one person in one day—two enemy attacks and two deadly storms. It has already shown why. Satan hated God and the witness of Job to God. He did not believe that God could attract pure worship. But God loved Job, was proud of him and confident in him. In fact, it was this delight of God in his servant that precipitated the disasters. God's confidence was vindicated: Job worshipped still and did not doubt the goodness of God.

As on the first occasion, it was God who precipitated the further contesting of Job's true worship. On this occasion, his wife joined ranks with Satan in goading him to curse God. His helper in serving God turned to divert him, but he rebuked her, acknowledging the appropriateness of receiving both good things and calamity from God. What would his friends say? They could not say anything at first because Job's suffering was so great.

Chapter 3

Job so wished not to have been born that he spoke bitterly against the day of his birth, cursed it for allowing him to see life. He could not remember any good and had no hope for the future. Then he said it would be better to be still born or abandoned and allowed to die rather than to have come to this. He would then share greatness with all the other dead, and the lack of consequence of any good or evil. All his zest for life was now turned on dying. The terrors that had been kept at bay (consider the possibility of his children cursing God which he made offerings for) had now settled on him. He had no reason to want to live. This bitter cry completes the scene against which the debate must now emerge. Here is a man who was righteous but with nothing to show for it.

But if the story is styled to set the coming debate in a situation of extreme crisis, it could not have been written without the taste of bitterness which comes in deepest sorrow. Who but one created in the image of God could feel such pain?

Chapters 4 and 5

Eliphaz saw this suffering from the outside—to speak of it as he did. He saw Job's impatience and his lack of hope (4:5–6) and this stirred him to affirm the creed he held—that righteous people would not be abandoned. Did Eliphaz then claim inspiration for effect, or did he see something new? What was this righteousness Job had been claiming? Did it have reality? Could anyone claim such a thing? Eliphaz did

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not apply this thought to himself but rigorously applied it to Job, and will do so in the coming pages. So, in this first speech, the essence of the debate was raised: 'Can a person be righteous before God, and can they maintain this belief when they have no proof of it in God's vindicating them?' This parallels the question raised in heaven: 'Does Job love God for nought?'

Eliphaz may have denied that there was any value in seeking the help of angels, and certainly denied that anything would be gained by getting upset. Eliphaz would seek God because the poor always have hope in God, and his chastenings come to an end, and the humble are healed. Job should have applied this to himself. All this was standard piety—frequently taught in the Psalms. Why could Job not apply it to himself? In fact, at the end of the book, it was Job who did the praying—for Eliphaz.