

WOMEN IN THE WORD

OF

FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

“Job: A 12-Week Study” by Eric Ortlund

Week Three: Job’s Cosmic Lament

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The Job of Chapter 3 is a very different man from the one we saw at the end of Chapter 2. What could have happened?

Job’s battle has now moved from outward circumstances to his mind and soul.

Following 7 days of silence, Job finally speaks, and what comes out leaves us shocked and dismayed. No, he does not curse God, but he is in agony, and he does not hold back in expressing his emotions and thoughts as he wrestles with trying to understand what has happened to him.

Job’s curse

From Chapter 3

¹After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. ² And Job said:

³ “Let the day perish on which I was born,
and the night that said,
‘A man is conceived.’

⁴ Let that day be darkness!
May God above not seek it,
nor light shine upon it.

⁵ Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
Let clouds dwell upon it;

let the blackness of the day terrify it.
⁶ That night—let thick darkness seize it!
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
let it not come into the number of the months.
⁷ Behold, let that night be barren;
let no joyful cry enter it.
⁸ Let those curse it who curse the day,
who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.
⁹ Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
let it hope for light, but have none,
nor see the eyelids of the morning,
¹⁰ because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb,
nor hide trouble from my eyes. (ESV)

Although Job knows it is not possible, he would like for the day of his birth to be eliminated so that he would not ever have existed.

In verse 4, he acknowledges God's hand in bringing light and life, although it is in a negative context. He wants God not to shine light upon the day of his birth, so that that day would never come into existence.

He then calls for the night of his conception to be cursed as well. He wills that it would be barren, thus no new life could result, including his own.

Verse 8 presents some difficulties, in part because of translation of the original words for *skilled* and *rouse*. Leviathan is the name for an ancient powerful sea creature or dragon, a symbol of chaos and evil in ancient mythology. It's not clear whether that means that Job expects Leviathan to somehow exert a destructive force to eliminate the night of his conception, or that he is asking for the help of the most powerful of ancient magicians – those who would dare to “rouse” such a powerful source of evil and chaos -- to do that.

He continues in the next verses to bemoan his conception and birth, which led to the suffering he is enduring now: “nor hide trouble from my eyes.”

Job is not the only Biblical figure who is in such despair that he no longer wants to live. The following passage from Jeremiah sounds remarkably similar to Job:

¹⁴ Cursed be the day
on which I was born!
The day when my mother bore me,
let it not be blessed!
¹⁵ Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father,
"A son is born to you,"
making him very glad.
¹⁶ Let that man be like the cities
that the LORD overthrew without pity;
let him hear a cry in the morning
and an alarm at noon,
¹⁷ because he did not kill me in the womb;
so my mother would have been my grave,
and her womb forever great.
¹⁸ Why did I come out from the womb
to see toil and sorrow,
and spend my days in shame? Jeremiah 20:14-18 (ESV)

Job's questions

Beginning with verse 11, Job changes from pronouncing curses to asking questions:

¹¹ "Why did I not die at birth,
come out from the womb and expire?
¹² Why did the knees receive me?
Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?
¹³ For then I would have lain down and been quiet;
I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,
¹⁴ with kings and counselors of the earth
who rebuilt ruins for themselves,
¹⁵ or with princes who had gold,
who filled their houses with silver.
¹⁶ Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child,
as infants who never see the light?

- ¹⁷ There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at rest.
¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease together;
they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.
¹⁹ The small and the great are there,
and the slave is free from his master.

In verse 11, Job departs from wishing he had never been born to wishing that he had either died right after birth or been stillborn. He would have been at rest and never known the turmoil of life.

Job points out that death brings equality to all social levels, and all experience the same rest and release from the toil of life, no matter how they spent their earthly years. Notice that there is no mention of rewards or punishments.

Job is essentially talking about things that, in reality, he simply does not know. It is interesting that later on, when God speaks, He sets him straight on his assumptions, although not by a declaration, but a question:

“Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?” Job 38:17 (NASB)

Job continues his questioning in verse 20:

- ²⁰ “Why is light given to him who is in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,
²¹ who long for death, but it comes not,
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,
²² who rejoice exceedingly
and are glad when they find the grave?
²³ Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
whom God has hedged in?” (ESV)

The implication here is that it is God who will not allow people who are suffering to die and be released from their misery. Job is asking questions that sound general, but clearly refer to him.

According to John Hartley, in verse 23, the word usually translated *way* is *derek*, and refers to his destiny. So there is a sense that Job feels he has no future.

There is also an ironic use of the term “hedged in” in this verse. In 1:10, Satan said that God had put a hedge of protection around Job. Here, Job sees a hedge that is trapping him, holding him a prisoner who cannot escape from the predicament he is in.

Job’s groaning

²⁴ For my sighing comes before ^{me} I eat,
And my groanings pour out like water.
²⁵ For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me,
And what I dreaded has happened to me.
²⁶ I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, for trouble comes.” (NKJV)

John Hartley says that regarding *naha*, which is usually translated *shrieks* or *sighs*, “the Hebrew root refers to the loud moans or wails that arise from those doing oppressive, slave labor or from a people devastated by a tragedy.” For example, in Exodus 2:23:

During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. (ESV)

The word translated *groaning* is often used figuratively for mighty sounds such as Yahweh’s thundering:

“You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:

“The LORD will roar from on high,
and from his holy habitation utter his voice;
he will roar mightily against his fold,
and shout, like those who tread grapes,
against all the inhabitants of the earth. Jeremiah 25:30 (ESV)

In verse 25, Job reveals that what he has dreaded has come to pass. When we recall from Chapter 1 that he sacrificed for his children out of concern that they might have cursed God in

their hearts, this sheds some light on what he probably means here. As we continue to read, we will see that what most grieves Job is that he has lost fellowship with God.

Job's lament ends with a final declaration of his constant turmoil. He will expand on that in later chapters, as he responds to the statements of his friends, and continues to pour out his heart to God and plead for relief.

As upsetting as it is to read this passage, in one sense, there is still some evidence here of Job's faith and how he views God even in the midst of this agony.

Personal application – dealing with our own and others' suffering

What can we learn from this difficult chapter in Job? Does it disturb us that a man who walked closely with God would say such things in his distress?

Profound suffering pierces us to the core, breaking down our defenses, and shattering self-confidence, our sense of order and stability.

We are dismayed, possibly frightened that Job gives vent to his feelings with such passion. We need to remember that emotions in and of themselves are not sinful.

Job does later cross a line into sin when He judges God, speaks wrongly about Him, and demands an explanation from Him. But he does not curse God as Satan predicted he would.

So, what do we do if we find ourselves experiencing despair or a deep struggle as Job did? We need to take all our hurt and pain to God Himself.

God never makes light of suffering. The best we can do is continue to pray to Him and trust Him.

We can also learn something here about helping those who are in the midst of great trials. We need to remember that very possibly, emotions are prevailing over reason.

Be a shoulder to lean on and a good listener. There will probably come a time when words of advice will be appropriate. But don't rush it.

Never give up, and never stop praying for a dear one who has lost his/her way. It is likely temporary and they need genuine love, sympathy and patience in the meantime.

Next week, Week Four:

Round One of the Debate, study book pp. 27- top of p. 30, question #3
Job Chapters 4-8