

**ACT ONE**  
**THE DEBATE ROUND ONE**  
**JOB 3-11**

## Introduction to the Dialogue (Chapters 3-31)

The author begins to speak with his own voice, and in poetry. In chapters 1 and 2 he reproduced a folk tale about a man called Job, a ‘blameless and upright man who feared God and kept clear of evil’(1:1, 8; 2:3). He is prosperous and so obviously blessed by God. However, as happens in life, he suffers a series of disasters. He loses his family (except for his wife) and all his possessions, and then his health and dignity. This severe series of trials is presented as allowed by God as a test. Job comes through the test admirably, retaining his faith in God and his exceptional virtue. He accepts his lot and submits humbly to what he sees as God’s will.

This is the tale that the author has chosen as the setting for his inquiry. It is not good enough to respond as Job has, for there are serious questions here about divine justice. It would make sense if God were punishing Job for sin. But this is clearly not the case. How can a just God permit such an innocent man to suffer in this way? The author is determined to explore this question, and it is one that challenges the simplistic traditional ‘wisdom’ that suffering must be God’s just response to sin. We will hear Job’s friends presenting this view, and we will hear the author, through Job, challenging it.

### 1. Job (3:1-26)

**<sup>1</sup>After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth, <sup>2</sup>saying:**

**<sup>3</sup>“Let the day perish in which I was born,**

**and the night that said: ‘a man-child is conceived.’**

The opening words placed by the author on the lips of the uncomplaining Job are a complaint. The Satan was confident that Job would ‘curse God to his face’(1:11; 2:5). Job does curse, but not God. He curses the day he was born. There are echoes here of Jeremiah:

Cursed be the day on which I was born!

The day when my mother bore me,  
let it not be blessed!

Cursed be the man

who brought the news to my father, saying,

“A child is born to you, a son,” making him very glad.

Let that man be like the cities

that YHWH overthrew without pity;

let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon,

because he did not kill me in the womb;

so my mother would have been my grave,

and her womb forever great.

Why did I come forth from the womb

to see toil and sorrow,

and spend my days in shame?

– Jeremiah 20:14-18

It will emerge that it is not so much his physical suffering that is troubling Job. Rather it is the conflict between his experience and the theology he has learned concerning righteousness and blessing, sin and suffering. Others will uphold the traditional ‘wisdom’, but in all honesty he can no longer do so. His world of meaning has collapsed. His suffering is unjust.

A dramatic contrast with the words: 'Let there be light!' (Genesis 1:3). After the purifying Flood, God re-established the rhythm of order (Genesis 8:22), which included day following night. Job wants chaos to reassert itself, so that there is no day. Better constant night than a day that brings with it such suffering. He would agree with Qohelet:

Better than both [the dead  
and the living] is the one  
who has not yet been, and  
has not seen the evil deeds  
that are done under the sun.

– Ecclesiastes 4:3

'Reclaim' (verse 5) translates *gā'al*. Just as the 'redeemer' (*gō'el*) was obliged to reclaim his nearest of kin from slavery, so Job wants gloom and darkness, to reclaim the day of his birth which rightly belongs to them. For Job life is a slavery.

He wants Leviathan (verse 8), the gigantic mythical serpent, to be aroused so that it will swallow up the day of his birth.

See the quote from Jeremiah on the previous page.

**<sup>4</sup>Let that day be darkness!  
May God know nothing of it,  
may light not shine on it.**

**<sup>5</sup>Let gloom and deep darkness reclaim it.  
Let clouds settle upon it;  
an eclipse shroud it in terror.**

**<sup>6</sup>That night – let thick darkness seize it!  
let it not count itself  
among the days of the year,  
or be numbered among the months.**

**<sup>7</sup>Yes, let that night be barren;  
let no joyful cry be heard in it.**

**<sup>8</sup>Let those curse it who curse the day,  
those who know how to arouse Leviathan.**

**<sup>9</sup>Let the stars be obscured at its dawn;  
let it hope for light, but have none;  
may it not see the eyelids of the morn —**

**<sup>10</sup>for it did not shut the doors  
of my mother's womb,  
and hide from my eyes such trouble.**

Job wishes he was never born

**<sup>11</sup>Why did I not die at birth,  
come forth from the womb and expire?**

**<sup>12</sup>Why were there knees to receive me,  
or breasts for me to suck?**

**<sup>13</sup>Now I would be resting, tranquil,  
sleeping in peace,**

**<sup>14</sup>like the kings and princes of the land  
who rebuild for themselves  
cities from ruins;**

**<sup>15</sup>or with nobles who possess gold,  
and fill their palaces with silver.**

**<sup>16</sup>Or why was I not buried  
like a stillborn child,  
like a foetus that never sees the light?**

**<sup>17</sup>There the commotion of the wicked ceases,  
there the weary are at rest.**

**<sup>18</sup>There the prisoners are at ease;  
they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.**

**<sup>19</sup>The small and the great are there together,  
and slaves are free from their masters.**

Death is the great leveller. What is the point of the kings rebuilding their cities (see Isaiah 58:12; 61:4)? What is the point of the nobility acquiring all their wealth? There are echoes here of the following from Qohelet. The great Solomon is speaking:

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

– Ecclesiastes 2:8-11

Compare:

A man may beget a hundred children, and live many years; but however many are the days of his years, if he does not enjoy life's good things, or has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered; moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.

– Ecclesiastes 6:3-5

## A lament addressed to God (3:20-23)

When Job thinks of God, he does not curse, but questions well up from the abyss of his suffering:

We are reminded of Elijah's plea. Running from persecution, he heads for Mount Sinai, but after one day's journeying in the wilderness, he cries:

It is enough; now, YHWH,  
take away my life, for I am no  
better than my ancestors.

– 1 Kings 19:4

We think, too, of Jonah, faced with what he saw as the failure of his mission:

And now, YHWH, please take  
my life from me, for it is bet-  
ter for me to die than to live.

– Jonah 4:3

Sirach exclaims:

O death, how welcome is  
your sentence to one who is  
needy and failing in strength,  
worn down by age and anx-  
ious about everything;  
to one who is contrary, and  
has lost all patience!

– Sirach 41:2

## Concluding cry (3:24-26)

We recall the words of the psalm-  
ist:

My tears have been my food  
day and night.

– Psalm 42:3

You have fed them with the  
bread of tears, and given them  
tears to drink in full measure.

– Psalm 80:5

**<sup>20</sup>Why does he give light to one in misery,  
and life to one who spends it  
in bitterness,**

**<sup>21</sup>who longs for death, but it does not come,  
and digs for it more than for  
hidden treasures,**

**<sup>22</sup>glad to get to the grave,  
happy to find the tomb?**

**<sup>23</sup>Why is light given to one  
who cannot see the way,  
because God has blocked his path?**

**<sup>24</sup>For my sighing has become my food,  
and my groanings fill my mouth  
like water.**

**<sup>25</sup>Truly the thing that I fear most  
comes upon me,  
and what I most dread befalls me.**

**<sup>26</sup>I am without peace, without quiet,  
without rest,  
alone in my agitation.**

2. Eliphaz (4:1 – 5:27)

**<sup>1</sup>Eliphaz from Teman replied:**

**<sup>2</sup>If I were to venture a word with you, would you be offended? But I have to say something.**

**<sup>3</sup>You have instructed many and have strengthened many a feeble arm.**

**<sup>4</sup>With your words you have lifted up those who were falling and have made steady trembling knees.**

**<sup>5</sup>Now that you are the one to whom things are happening, don't you know how to cope? How can what you are going through upset you so much?**

**<sup>6</sup>Is not your fear [of God] your source of confidence? and the integrity of your life your hope?**

Appeal to experience I (4:7-11)

**<sup>7</sup>Can you recall an innocent person ever perishing? where have you ever witnessed an upright person cut off?**

**<sup>8</sup>Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble I know from experience, will reap the same.**

Eliphaz's tone is gentle and personal, but we already have the impression that he is more interested in giving good advice than in trying to understand how Job is feeling. His compassion is from the outside. There is no attempt to try to understand Job through a sharing of his pain. For the imagery in verses 3-4 see Isaiah 35:3; Hebrews 12:12. Verse six picks up the description of Job found in 1:1, 8 and 2:3.

Appeal to experience I (4:7-11)

Though Eliphaz is claiming to speak from experience, it is already clear that he is offering a standard, but abstract, response, and one that the author of Job wants to show as quite unsatisfactory. Eliphaz's words recall an equally unsatisfactory statement of another 'wise man':

I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

– Psalm 37:25 (see Proverbs 12:21)

One wonders where this old man has lived, or how open his eyes have been. This standard view persisted. We find it repeated in the second century BC:

Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected?

– Sirach 2:10

This simplistic view is supported by the half-truth expressed in the proverb in verse 8.

Compare the following:

They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

– Hosea 8:7 (see 10:13)

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity.

– Proverbs 22:8

Eliphaz continues with his general principles, this time arguing from effect back to cause. If someone perishes, it must be because God is angry with him, just as if young lions are left abandoned it must be because the adult lions are not there to feed them. Hebrew has a rich vocabulary when it comes to speaking about lions. Five different words are used in verses 10-11: 'aryê, šāḥal, k'pîr, layiš, labî'.

**<sup>9</sup>God breathes: they perish,  
his angry breath consumes them.  
<sup>10</sup>If the lion roars,  
and the lioness echoes his roar,  
the teeth of the young lions shake.  
<sup>11</sup>The lion perishes for lack of prey,  
and the whelps of the lioness scatter.**

Appeal to a divine revelation (4:12-21)

The Flood was meant to purify humanity. When it was over, God promised:

I will never again curse the  
ground because of humankind,  
for the inclination of the human  
heart is evil from youth

– Genesis 8:21

Job has a reputation for being a just and religious man, but he is human, and therefore (so the argument goes) is necessarily a sinner.

The theme that all human beings are sinners will recur in Job (see 14:4; 15:14; 25:4-6). See also the following from the Psalmist:

No one living is righteous  
before you.

– Psalm 143:2

'Servants' in verse 18 is a reference to the lesser 'gods' (see comment on 1:6), redefined as 'angels'.

On verse 19 see Genesis 2:7; 3:19. 'Houses' refers to the body (see Wisdom 9:15; 2Corinthians 5:1).

On verse 21 compare Isaiah 33:20; 38:12; and for the general mood see Psalm 90.

**<sup>12</sup>Just now a word came stealthily to me,  
and my ear picked up its whisper;  
<sup>13</sup>amid thoughts that come at night  
in dreams,  
when deep sleep weighs us down,  
<sup>14</sup>dread came upon me, and trembling;  
my bones were shaking.  
<sup>15</sup>A spirit glided past my face;  
the hair of my flesh bristled.  
<sup>16</sup>It stood still  
– I could not discern its features – ;  
only a shape, there before my eyes,  
at first it was silent; then I heard a voice:  
<sup>17</sup>'Can a human being marshall arguments  
against God? or one who is mortal  
be pure before his Creator?  
<sup>18</sup>Even in his servants,  
he puts no trust, and he finds things  
lacking in his angels,  
<sup>19</sup>how can they be clean before their  
Maker who live in houses of clay,  
formed from the dust?  
<sup>20</sup>Between morning and evening  
they collapse, and without anyone  
noticing, they perish forever.  
<sup>21</sup>Their tent-cord is undone,  
and they die, not knowing why.'**

Appeal to experience II (5:1-7)

<sup>1</sup>Call out now,  
and see if anyone answers you;  
to which of the holy ones  
will you turn?

<sup>2</sup>Surely anger kills the fool,  
and passion brings death  
to the imprudent.

<sup>3</sup>I have seen the fool taking root,  
but suddenly his pasture dries up,  
<sup>4</sup>his children with no defence,  
dragged before the court,  
with no way of escaping;  
<sup>5</sup>The hungry devour his harvest,  
the needy gobble up  
his possessions,  
and the thirsty swallow down  
his wealth.

<sup>6</sup>Does not misery come  
from the earth?  
does not trouble sprout  
from the ground?

<sup>7</sup>Human beings are born to trouble  
as sure as sparks fly upward.

The 'holy ones' are lesser gods, the servants, the angels of 4:18 (see also 15:15). Eliphaz is telling Job that there is no point in looking for an intercessor in heaven. The problem is not there, it is on earth.

He is hinting that Job should be looking at his own behaviour and doing something about his own sin, instead of bemoaning his fate. Giving vent to his strong feelings, as he has just done, shows a lack of wisdom. Once again, Eliphaz's words express an aspect of the truth, and what was generally accepted as wisdom:

Waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them.

– Proverbs 1:32

One's own folly leads to ruin,  
yet the heart rages against YHWH.

– Proverbs 19:3.

One who is quick-tempered  
acts foolishly.

– Proverbs 14:17 (see 14:30)

In verses 3-5 he goes on to give some examples of what happens when a person does not act wisely. His children are left without the kind of wise guidance they have a right to expect, and end up in all kinds of trouble. Furthermore the poor, whom a person in his folly has oppressed in his drive for wealth, end up enjoying the fruits of his labour. Job is a very wealthy man. Eliphaz is prodding him to examine his conscience!

He concludes his reflections with another half-truth. We shouldn't look around to see who to blame, but we should recognise that we are only human, and so cannot avoid trouble. In the words of the Psalmist:

Our days are only toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

– Psalm 90:10



## Eliphaz offers unsolicited advice (5:8-16)

The opening words of Eliphaz's unsolicited advice alert the reader to be wary of taking the advice on board. 'If I were you'? Eliphaz is not Job, nor has he taken the time to be invited into Job's confidence in order to feel Job's situation from the inside. His advice to have recourse to God is, of course, good, nor does Job have an argument with what he says about God in verses 9-11.

On verse 9, Job will speak later of God as one

who does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number.

– Job 9:10

Compare the prayer of the Psalmist:

Great is YHWH, and greatly to be praised; his greatness cannot be fathomed.

– Psalm 145:3

On verse 10, see Job 36:27-28; 38:25-28. On verse 11 see Job 36:7; 1Samuel 2:8; Psalm 113:7.

But is Eliphaz's understanding of God as expressed in verses 12-16 born of insight? Or is it a standard, superficial and ultimately simplistic view of how God acts in this world? The author wants his readers to ask this question.

In relation to verse 15, we know something that Eliphaz doesn't know: God and the Satan have agreed. The Satan's hand is not violent! There is a further irony in verse 16. Eliphaz himself is speaking unjustly, yet shows no sign of shutting his mouth! The hope he is pointing Job towards is to accept what is happening to him as a salutary punishment from God for his sins. This sounds wise, and would often be appropriate advice, but does it actually help Job?

**<sup>8</sup>If I were you,  
I would have recourse to God,  
and to him I would commit  
my cause.**

**<sup>9</sup>He performs  
incomprehensible wonders,  
marvellous things without  
number:**

**<sup>10</sup>he gives rain on the earth,  
irrigates the fields,  
<sup>11</sup>lifts up the lowly,  
gives secure refuge to the  
afflicted,**

**<sup>12</sup>frustrates the plans of the crafty,  
so that they achieve no success,  
<sup>13</sup>catches up the cunning  
in their own nets,  
and brings failure to the schemes  
of the wily;  
<sup>14</sup>and so, in full daylight, they find  
themselves in darkness,  
and grope at noonday  
as in the night.**

**<sup>15</sup>This God saves the poor  
from their sharpened tongue,  
from their violent hand;  
<sup>16</sup>gives hope to the desolate,  
and makes injustice  
shut its mouth.**

God's wonderful action in the world (5:17-26)

**<sup>17</sup>How happy is the one  
whom God corrects:  
do not reject the punishment  
of the Almighty,**

Carried away by his own rhetoric, Eliphaz begins from an assumption which he is confident in, but which the author wants us to question. The assumption is that what is happening to Job is a divine punishment for Job's sin. The beginning of verse 17 is echoed in the Book of Proverbs:

My child, do not despise YHWH's discipline or be weary of his reproof,  
for YHWH reproves the one he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

– Proverbs 3:11-12

'The Almighty' in verse 17 translates the Hebrew אֱלֹהֵי שָׂדָי [šaddai]. This is the first of 31 times it is used in Job. It hearkens back to patriarchal times, and appears to be a title for the god of the mountain (see Genesis 17:1; Exodus 6:3).

**<sup>18</sup>for he wounds,  
but binds up the wound,  
he strikes  
and heals with the same hand.  
<sup>19</sup>He saves you from six dangers;  
in the seventh  
you will suffer no harm.**

Eliphaz then waxes eloquent on how wonderful God is. Verse 16 is echoed in Isaiah who speaks of

the day when YHWH binds up the injuries of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

– Isaiah 30:26

The Book of Deuteronomy has God say:

I am he; there is no god beside me.  
I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
and no one can deliver from my hand.

– Deuteronomy 32:39

The prophet Hosea says:

Come, let us return to YHWH  
for it is he who has torn, and he will  
heal us; he has struck down, and he  
will bind us up.

– Hosea 6:1

Is everything really as straightforward as Eliphaz thinks?

Verses 20-22 list seven dangers from which God delivers us (see verse 19). Seven is symbolic for totality. The 'lash of the tongue' could refer to calumny. It may also be referring to an unjust verdict that is the result of false witness.

**<sup>20</sup>In hunger he will deliver you  
from death,  
and in war from the power of the sword;  
<sup>21</sup>he will shield you from the lash  
of the tongue,  
and when disaster strikes,  
you will not fear;  
<sup>22</sup>at demons and famine you will laugh,  
and will not fear the wild animals.**

In verses 23-26 Eliphaz follows on with seven blessings abundantly poured out by God. A pact with wild animals is a messianic motif (see Hosea 2:20; Isaiah 11:6-8).

**<sup>23</sup>You will be in league with the spirits  
of the field  
and will enjoy peace with the animals  
of the wild,  
<sup>24</sup>you will know joy in the peace  
of your tent  
you will inspect your property  
and find nothing missing;**

On verses 25-26 see the conclusion to the folk tale (Job 42:16).

**<sup>25</sup>you will see a large number  
of descendants,  
your offspring like the grass of the field;  
<sup>26</sup>you will come to your grave  
in ripe old age,  
as sheaves of grain come up to the  
threshing floor in their season.**

#### Conclusion (5:27)

Eliphaz (to his own satisfaction) has the whole situation wrapped up. It is all clear. All Job has to do is reflect on the obvious truth of what Eliphaz has said, apply it to himself, repent of his sins and 'commit his cause to God' (5:8).

**<sup>27</sup>All this we have thoroughly scrutinised:  
you cannot argue with it;  
hear, and apply it to yourself.**

3. Job's reply to Eliphaz (6:1 – 7:21)

- <sup>1</sup>Then Job answered:**  
**<sup>2</sup>If it was possible to weigh  
my affliction  
and load onto the balance  
all my troubles,  
<sup>3</sup>it would be heavier  
than the sand of the sea.  
That is why I was raving so.**  
**<sup>4</sup>The arrows of the Almighty  
pierce me  
and I suck in their poison;  
the terrors of God beset me.**  
**<sup>5</sup>Does the wild ass bray  
over its grass,  
or the ox low over its fodder?**  
**<sup>6</sup>Can that which is tasteless be  
eaten without salt,  
or is there any flavour in the  
juice of mallows?**  
**<sup>7</sup>That which was loathsome to me  
is now my food,  
that is what is making me sick.**  
**<sup>8</sup>If only I might have my request,  
and God would grant me  
my hope:**  
**<sup>9</sup>that it would please God  
to crush me,  
and with one blow cut me  
from the loom.**  
**<sup>10</sup>This would at least bring me  
some comfort.  
I would even leap for joy  
in unrelenting pain,  
for I have not denied the words  
of the Holy One.**

Job (verses 2-3) feels that Eliphaz has no idea of the extent of his suffering. If he did he would understand Job's 'raving'.

In verse 4 the Almighty God (šaddai) is likened to an archer piercing him with poisoned arrows. Compare Lamentations 3:12-13; Psalm 38:2, and the following from Psalm 7:13.

He has prepared his deadly weapons,  
making his arrows fiery shafts.

If the ass or ox are eating you won't hear them complaining of hunger (verse 5). If everything was all right with Job, he wouldn't be complaining either. If Job is delirious it is because the pain is too much to bear.

Eliphaz thinks he has put forward a logical argument, but he has no understanding of Job's suffering. Eliphaz means well but his argument and advice make Job sick (verses 6-7).

Job's request is that he be allowed to die (see 3:11). For the image in verses 8-9 compare:

My dwelling is plucked up and removed  
from me like a shepherd's tent; like a  
weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts  
me off from the loom; from day to night  
you bring me to an end.

– Isaiah 38:12

Verse 10 is a significant statement. Another reason for Job wanting death now is that he wants to die not having offended God. His suffering, his confusion, his anger and his questions are all real. His religious stance is just as genuine. This is the only time in Job that God is referred to as 'the Holy One'. It is found 39 times in the Isaiah scroll.

Job is exhausted (verses 11-13).

- <sup>11</sup>What strength do I have left  
to put up a resistance?  
What destiny do I hope for,  
that I should be patient?**
- <sup>12</sup>Is my strength the strength of stones?  
Is my flesh made of bronze?**
- <sup>13</sup>In truth I have nothing left in me  
to sustain me,  
and good fortune deserts me.**

He compares his so-called friends to a torrent that dries up in the heat, just when the need for water is greatest (6:14-21)

- <sup>14</sup>One who is sick should have the loyalty  
of friends,  
even if the Almighty abandons him;**
- <sup>15</sup>but my companions are as treacherous  
as a river bed,  
like a passing torrent, they have disappeared.**
- <sup>16</sup>Its dark waters descend from the glacier  
covered with snow,  
<sup>17</sup>but come the first heat the river disappears;  
when it is hot, it vanishes  
<sup>18</sup>and leaves no trace.  
It flows into the wilderness and disappears.**
- <sup>19</sup>The caravans of Tema search for its waters,  
and those travelling from Sheba depend on it.**
- <sup>20</sup>Their expectations come to nothing;  
when they reach it, they find they have  
been cheated.**
- <sup>21</sup>Such you have now become to me;  
you see my calamity, and you are afraid.**

Tema is one of the major caravan oasis cities of northern Arabia. Sheba is modern Yemen in south Arabia (see 1:15).

All Job's fine weather friends can do when they see his suffering is think of and fear for themselves. There is a play on sound in the Hebrew of verse 21: 'you see' is *tir'û*; 'you fear' is *tîr'e'û*.

The fact is he didn't ask them for anything. But since they have got themselves involved, the least they can do is listen to his side of the argument.

For verse 23 see Jeremiah 15:21.

- <sup>22</sup>Have I asked you to give me something,  
a gift from your purse,**
- <sup>23</sup>to save me from my adversary,  
to rescue me from this tyrannical power?**

- <sup>24</sup>Instruct me, and I will be silent;  
demonstrate to me how I have  
gone wrong.**
- <sup>25</sup>How persuasive your reasoning is!  
But your proofs, what do they prove?**
- <sup>26</sup>You want to argue against what I  
have said,  
as though the words of a desperate man  
were no more than hot air?**
- <sup>27</sup>You are not beyond casting lots for  
an orphan,  
and bargaining to sell one of  
your friends.**
- <sup>28</sup>So now, pay close attention to me;  
I swear I will not lie to your face.**
- <sup>29</sup>Please, let us continue, but with no  
wrangling over words.  
Let us continue. It is my innocence  
that is at stake here.**
- <sup>30</sup>Is there any wrong on my tongue?  
Is my mouth perhaps not weighing  
properly my words?**

Job is willing to listen if Eliphaz can tell him what he has done to deserve his suffering. So far he is not impressed by the arguments put forward by Eliphaz, nor is he impressed with him and his two silent companions.

They are as heartless as creditors arguing over a widow's children whom they can take and sell into slavery (see 2Kings 4:1).

Job now sets out to persuade them that his behaviour has not earned the suffering he is experiencing.

What is it to be a human being?(7:1-11)

‘Conscript’ in verse 1 translates the Hebrew **סָבָא** [šābā’, army]. Soldiers were conscripted.

At least darkness brings some shade for the slave working under the hot sun. At least hired labour can look forward to some payment at the end of the day. Job has nothing to look forward to.

Psalm 8 looks at what it means to be a human being. Job’s answer is closer to that of Qohelet:

What do human beings get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest.

– Ecclesiastes 2:22-23

On verse 6 see 4:21. There is a word play in Hebrew. **תִּקְוָה** [tiqwāh] means both ‘hope’ and ‘thread’ (see Joshua 2:18). On verse 7, see 5:6-7. The Psalmist writes:

Our years come to an end like a sigh  
... their span is only toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

– Psalm 90:9-10

From verses 9-10 it is clear that Job shared the understanding of his contemporaries that physical death is the end of life (see texts pages 96-98). The Psalmist writes:

Hear my prayer, YHWH, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears. Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more.”

– Psalm 39:12-13

As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

– Psalm 103:15-16

**<sup>1</sup>Man’s existence on earth is that of a conscript,  
his life is that of a hired labourer.**

**<sup>2</sup>He is like a slave who longs for shade,  
like a labourer who looks for his wages.**

**<sup>3</sup>I am allotted months of emptiness,  
nights of misery are assigned to me**

**<sup>4</sup>When I lie down I wonder,  
‘When shall I rise?’  
But the night is long, and I toss  
and turn until dawn.**

**<sup>5</sup>I am covered with worms and dirt;  
my skin shrivels up and festers.**

**<sup>6</sup>My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,  
and come to their end,  
without hope.**

**<sup>7</sup>Remember that my life is a breath  
and that my eye will never again  
see happiness.**

**<sup>8</sup>The one who keeps his eye on me  
will see me no more;  
when you look for me, I shall be gone.**

**<sup>9</sup>As the cloud passes and vanishes,  
he who goes down into the tomb  
does not come up again;**

**<sup>10</sup>he does not return to his house,  
his dwelling will not see him  
again.**

**<sup>11</sup>Therefore I will not restrain  
my tongue,  
I will speak out in the anguish  
of my spirit,  
I will complain in the bitterness  
of my soul.**

Job questions God (7:12-21)

- 12Am I the Sea, or the Dragon,  
that you constrict in?**
- 13When I think that my bed will  
bring me some relief,  
that my couch will share my  
moaning,**
- 14you scare me with dreams  
and terrify me with visions.**
- 15I would prefer to be strangled to  
death  
than suffer from these invisible  
hands.**
- 16Since I am not going to live forever  
leave me alone, for my days are  
a fleeting breath.**
- 17What is man, that you make  
so much of him,  
that you occupy yourself with him,  
18to check on him every morning,  
and test him every minute?**
- 19When are you going to take your  
eyes off me,  
and leave me alone long enough  
to swallow my spittle?**
- 20If I have sinned, what do I do  
to you, you watcher of humanity?  
Why have you made me your tar-  
get?  
Why have I become a burden  
to myself?**
- 21Why do you not pardon my  
transgression  
and take away my iniquity,  
since very soon I shall lie in the  
dust.  
Are you going to come looking for  
me,  
even though I am not there?**

In the Ugaritic myth the weather-god, Baal, defeats the sea-god Yamm. The Sea (Yamm) and the Dragon (Tannin), are constricted, hemmed in by the land. Why is God giving Job no escape from his sufferings?

There is an echo in verses 13-15 of Eliphaz's disturbing dream (see 4:12-16).

The word translated 'breath' in verse 16 is **לְהֵבֶל** [hēbel – Qohelet's favourite word]. In verse 7 it was **רִיחַ** [rūah]. The words are used in parallel in Isaiah 57:3.

Verses 17-18 appear as a parody of Psalm 8. On verses 19-20 see 13:27.

Verses 20-21 are important. Job is not claiming to be innocent. But he wants to know why forgiveness has been withheld (compare 10:14; 14:16-17). Furthermore, he wants to know what has he done to deserve this suffering?

Job is rejecting the central argument put forward by Eliphaz: namely, that there is an appropriateness in suffering given by a just God, and that it is measured by one's sin. This is not only Eliphaz's idea. It is the standard theology of the day. Job rejects it, and does not hold back in questioning God. We who have been watching the drama from the beginning, know that God is keeping his eye on Job. We also know something that neither Job nor Eliphaz know: namely, that God is delighted with Job and admires his honesty and his religiosity. This makes the questions asked by Job all the more important for us. If we think, as the author's contemporaries thought, that God is the cause of everything that happens, we have to ask: Why is God causing Job to suffer, since he does not deserve it?



## 4. Bildad (8:1-22)

As far as Bildad (see 2:11) is concerned Job's outburst is full of feeling, but empty. In fact, Bildad shows no interest in facts. His argument, as verse 3 shows, is from general principles. God is just. Abraham appealed to the truth expressed in verse 3 when he was appealing to God not to punish the innocent with the guilty in Sodom:

Far be it from you to do such a thing,  
to slay the righteous with the wicked,  
so that the righteous fare as the wicked!  
Far be that from you! Shall not the  
Judge of all the earth do what is just?

– Genesis 18:25

The obvious conclusion is that what is happening to Job is just. Therefore he must have done something to deserve it. Verse 4 makes an interesting connection to the folk tale (see 1:18-19).

Job should take the opportunity to repent and everything will be fine. Job has just challenged his friends to look at the facts and judge him on them (see 6:28). Bildad is comfortable staying with generalisations. For Bildad the response is simple. Admit sin, repent, and the future will be splendid.

For verse 8 compare Moses' words:

Remember the days of old, consider  
the years long past; ask your father,  
and he will inform you; your elders,  
and they will tell you.

– Deuteronomy 32:7

In relation to verse 9 listen to Qohelet:

Who knows what is good for mortal  
human beings while they live the few  
days of their vain life, which pass like  
a shadow?

– Ecclesiastes 6:12

See also Job 14:1-2 and Psalm 102:11.

Bildad correctly claims that his teaching is traditional.

**<sup>1</sup>Then Bildad from Shuah spoke:**

**<sup>2</sup>How long are you going to prattle  
on like this?**

**Your words are so much hot air.**

**<sup>3</sup>Does God pervert justice?  
Does the Almighty distort  
what is right?**

**<sup>4</sup>If your children sinned against him,  
he has already abandoned them  
to the power of their crime.**

**<sup>5</sup>But if you were earnestly to  
seek God  
and make supplication to  
the Almighty,**

**<sup>6</sup>if you keep yourself pure  
and honest,  
surely then he will rouse himself  
for you  
and restore to you your  
rightful place.**

**<sup>7</sup>Then your past would be a trifle,  
in comparison to your splendid  
future.**

**<sup>8</sup>Inquire now of bygone generations,  
and consider the experience of your  
ancestors;**

**<sup>9</sup>for we are born only yesterday,  
and we know nothing,  
like a shadow on the ground  
are our days.**

**<sup>10</sup>But they would be able to  
instruct you,  
drawing memories from their  
heart.**

Bildad describes the life of a godless person (8:11-19)

- <sup>11</sup>Can papyrus grow where there is  
no marsh?  
Can reeds flourish where there is  
no water?
- <sup>12</sup>While still green, without being cut,  
they wither before any other plant.
- <sup>13</sup>Such is the destiny of those who  
forget God  
So vanishes all hope for the godless.
- <sup>14</sup>His confidence is fragile,  
a spider's web his security;
- <sup>15</sup>If he leans on it,  
it will not support him;  
if he tries to grab hold of it,  
he will fall.
- <sup>16</sup>Full of sap, in the sunshine,  
he spreads out through the whole  
of his garden.
- <sup>17</sup>but his roots are twining around rocks,  
and he is clinging to a wall of stone.
- <sup>18</sup>When his place swallows him,  
it disowns him, saying,  
'I have never seen you.'
- <sup>19</sup>In this way his happy career  
comes to an end,  
and out of the earth another plant  
will spring.
- <sup>20</sup>No, God does not reject the blameless,  
nor does he offer his hand to evildoers.
- <sup>21</sup>He will yet fill your mouth  
with laughter,  
your lips with shouts of joy.
- <sup>22</sup>Those who hate you will be clothed  
with shame,  
and the tent of the wicked  
will be no more.

Job would have no argument with Bildad's unsolicited (see 6:22) homily on the emptiness of a godless life. Between the lines, however, as will soon become obvious, Bildad is accusing Job of being godless, and attributing his sufferings to that.

The conclusion to Bildad's homily is in verses 20-22: God does not reject the blameless person. Since Job has been rejected, he is not blameless. If he repents everything will be wonderful.

We who have witnessed the opening scenes in heaven know that God has not rejected Job. We also know that his suffering is not punishment for sin. Bildad does not know what we know.

The author's point is that Bildad (and anyone who thinks like him) should not be as confident as he is in the simplistic theology that he has learned. He should be looking at the facts of the case, which would cause him to do what the author is hoping the reader will do: question the validity of the traditional view that links suffering with sin and punishment.

Mouthing general principles without concern for facts is a way of doing theology that did not go out of fashion with Bildad's generation!

## 5. Job (9:1 – 10:22)

In verse 2 Job is quoting something Eliphaz said earlier (see 4:17). Compare:

Who can say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin”?

– Proverbs 20:9

Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

– Psalm 143:2

Even if you came up with a thousand arguments, at best God might consider one of them worthy of some kind of response.

God’s wisdom and power are beyond question. But Job immediately focuses on another aspect. God can be cruel. If one dares to resist God, one is looking for trouble. Look at the way God treats creation!

‘Chambers of the south’(verse 9) appears to be a reference to the mythical sources of the south wind.

Job began his response by quoting Eliphaz. He quotes him again in verse ten (see 5:9).

In verses 11-12 Job turns to look at how God treats human beings. As Moses discovered, we human beings, though made in the image and likeness of God, and though we have this radical longing to be in communion with God, are not permitted to see God’s face (see Exodus 33:23). God chooses to remain elusive.

The image used by Job in verse 12 is used by the psalmist when he talks about people pursuing him:

Like a lion they will tear me apart; they will drag me away, with no one to rescue.

– Psalm 7:2

We are back to verse two. How can a human being argue with God?

**<sup>1</sup>Job replied:**

**<sup>2</sup>Indeed I know very well  
that this is so;  
man cannot marshall arguments  
against God.**

**<sup>3</sup>If one wished to contend with  
him,  
he would not answer once in  
a thousand.**

**<sup>4</sup>He is wise in heart, and mighty  
in strength.  
Who has resisted him,  
and remained unharmed?**

**<sup>5</sup>He moves mountains  
without warning,  
and rips them apart in his fury;**

**<sup>6</sup>he shakes the very centre  
of the earth,  
and its pillars tremble;**

**<sup>7</sup>he commands the sun not to rise;  
and seals up the stars;**

**<sup>8</sup>he alone stretched out the  
heavens  
and trod on the back of the sea;**

**<sup>9</sup>he created the Bear and Orion,  
the Pleiades and the chambers  
of the south;**

**<sup>10</sup>he does great things beyond  
understanding,  
and marvellous things  
without number.**

**<sup>11</sup>If he passes close by me,  
I do not see him;  
if he brushes past me,  
I do not feel it.**

**<sup>12</sup>If he drags something away,  
who can get it back?  
Who can say to him,  
‘What are you doing?’**

How can we argue with God?

- <sup>13</sup>God does not hold back  
when he is angry.  
All the legions of Rahab  
groveled beneath him,**
- <sup>14</sup>how then can I resist him,  
or think up arguments  
against him?**
- <sup>15</sup>Even if I were right, I would get  
no reply,  
I would have to appeal to my  
adversary for mercy.**
- <sup>16</sup>If I subpoenaed him  
to respond to me,  
I do not believe that he would  
listen to my harangue.**
- <sup>17</sup>He would sweep me away  
with the tempest,  
and would wound me a thousand  
times for no reason;**
- <sup>18</sup>he would not let me get my breath,  
but saturate me with bitterness.**
- <sup>19</sup>If it is a contest of strength,  
he is the strong one!  
If it is a matter of justice,  
who can summon him?**
- <sup>20</sup>Even if I were innocent,  
his words would condemn me;  
even if I were without guilt,  
he would declare me corrupt.**
- <sup>21</sup>I am innocent! I do not care to live;  
I loathe my existence.**
- <sup>22</sup>It is all the same – I swear it –  
he destroys both the innocent  
and the guilty.**

Once again, our author uses the language of myth. Compare Isaiah:

Was it not you who cut Rahab in  
pieces, who pierced the Dragon?

– Isaiah 51:9

Job cannot argue with God, but he gives vent to his feelings that God has no interest in Job's defence.

We know, but Job does not, that God has already used the words 'for no reason' (verse 17) in his discussion with Satan:

YHWH 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. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."

– Job 2:3

We know, but Job does not, that God is in full agreement with Job, that the suffering which Job is going through is 'for no reason'.

For an innocent person to be condemned questions God's justice as traditionally asserted:

One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to YHWH.

– Proverbs 17:15.

Qohelet is with Job:

The same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath.

– Ecclesiastes 9:2

Job persists in asserting his innocence. God must be indifferent to good or evil.

Job's complain is that God not only makes no distinction between the innocent and the guilty, he also mocks at the suffering of the innocent (verse 23), and has handed the world over to the wicked (verse 24). This makes nonsense of the traditional 'wisdom' that it is the righteous who will possess the land (see Proverbs 2:21; 10:30; Psalm 37:9). Since judges are blind to justice, it must be God who wants it that way. On the assumption that whatever happens is ultimately done by God (see Introduction page 95-96) what other conclusion can we draw?

If he tries to accept what is happening and to put on a smiling face, he gets discouraged by the thought that God will just pile on more suffering.

He can't take his oppressor to court and get a fair judgment. God holds all the cards.

**<sup>23</sup>If a disaster brings sudden death,  
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.**

**<sup>24</sup>He hands over the earth to the power  
of the wicked  
and covers over the eyes of its judges.**

**If he is not responsible, then who is?**

**<sup>25</sup>My days are swifter than a runner;  
they flee away without tasting happiness.**

**<sup>26</sup>They go by like skiffs of reed,  
like an eagle swooping on the prey.**

**<sup>27</sup>If I say, 'I will forget my affliction;  
I will put off my sad countenance,'**

**<sup>28</sup>I fear all kinds of suffering,  
knowing that you will not absolve me.**

**<sup>29</sup>If on the other hand I am guilty;  
why do I exhaust myself worrying?**

**<sup>30</sup>Even if I wash myself with soap  
and cleanse my hands with lye,**

**<sup>31</sup>yet you will plunge me into filth,  
and my own clothes will abhor me.**

**<sup>32</sup>God is not a man like me to be able to say:  
"Let us go together to the court."**

**<sup>33</sup>There is no umpire between us,  
who might lay his hand on us both,**

**<sup>34</sup>and remove from me his rod,  
to stop me going mad through fear of him.**

**<sup>35</sup>Then I could speak with him without fear,  
but that is not how I am with him.**

Job continues

**<sup>1</sup>I loathe my life;**

**I will give free utterance to  
my complaint;**

**I will give vent to the bitterness  
of my soul.**

**<sup>2</sup>I will say to God: 'Do not condemn me;  
tell me what you have against me.'**

**<sup>3</sup>Does it seem good to you to oppress,  
and despise the work of your hands  
while you favour the schemes  
of the wicked?**

**<sup>4</sup>Do you have eyes of flesh  
and see only as humans see?**

**<sup>5</sup>Are your days like the days of mortals,  
or your years like human years**

**<sup>6</sup>for you to seek out my iniquity  
and inquire into my sin,**

**<sup>7</sup>to know that I am not guilty,  
and that no one will snatch me  
out of your hand?**

**<sup>8</sup>Your hands fashioned and made me,  
everything about me; and now you  
destroy me?**

**<sup>9</sup>Remember that you fashioned me  
from clay;  
and will you turn me to dust again?**

**<sup>10</sup>Did you not pour me out like milk  
and curdle me like cheese?**

**<sup>11</sup>You clothed me with skin and flesh,  
and knit me together with bones  
and sinews.**

**<sup>12</sup>Did you not grant me life  
and steadfast love,  
and has not your providence cared for  
my spirit?**

Job has just declared: 'I am innocent' (9:21). He makes the same point here. Since he is not guilty, God ought to know it. Instead of condemning Job to suffering, why doesn't God tell Job what he has done wrong to deserve it?

What is God up to – favouring the wicked and causing the righteous to suffer? If God were like us he would set up an inquiry and discover that Job was not guilty.

Job is questioning God, but out of a deep desire for justice. He does not curse God, as the Satan was so sure he would. In the midst of his terrible suffering he can still say: 'no one will snatch me out of your hand' (verse 7). There is nothing superficial or automatic about his faith in God. He knows God well. He wants justice, and he wants it from God.

In verses 8-12 the urgent questioning gives way to a gentle affirmation of God's role in bringing Job into being and in caring for him. Compare:

When their breath departs, they  
return to the earth.

– Psalm 146:4

Your eyes beheld my unformed  
substance.

– Psalm 139:16

According to the understanding of the time human life came entirely from the male semen which was poured into the womb where it was nurtured and developed. We recall the words of the Psalmist:

It was you who formed my inward  
parts; you knit me together in my  
mother's womb.

– Psalm 139:13

Job remembers his intimate communion with God before calamity struck.

Job is claiming to have seen through what God is up to.

**<sup>13</sup>Yet, in spite of all this, you held back something:**

**now I know what your plan is:**

**<sup>14</sup>if I were to make a mistake,  
you would note it,  
and would not let me get away with it.**

**<sup>15</sup>If I were guilty, woe to me!  
If I were innocent, and kept my head low,  
I'd have my fill of insults,  
and be steeped in affliction.**

Man is like a lion, master of the forest that is this world, free to do what he likes. This is how it seems, but it is not how it is. The forest is controlled by God. The lion is there just as a diversion for God to enjoy the hunt.

Man thinks he is free to dominate the world, but God has him on a leash and is playing with him. If the lion lifts up its head and dares to show fight, the hunter is excited. It makes the hunt all the more enjoyable. Just so, if a man dares to lift his head and claim innocence, God seems all the more to enjoy hunting him down.

In verses 18-22 Job reiterates the cry of his opening discourse (3:3ff).

On the brevity of life see 7:6-21; 14:1-6. The Psalmist prays:

“Hear my prayer, YHWH and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears. Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more.”

– Psalm 39:12-13

**<sup>16</sup>If I raised my head, you would hunt me  
as you hunt a lion,  
you would enjoy repeating your  
incredible exploits against me,  
<sup>17</sup>renewing your attacks against me,  
redoubling your anger toward me;  
massing your troops against me.**

**<sup>18</sup>Why then did you bring me forth  
from the womb?  
Would that I had died before any eye  
had seen me,**

**<sup>19</sup>and were as though I had not been,  
led from the womb to the grave.**

**<sup>20</sup>How few are the days of my life?  
If God would only desist and distance  
himself from me,  
that way I would have a moment of joy,**

**<sup>21</sup>before departing, never to return,  
to the land of darkness and shadow,**

**<sup>22</sup>to the mournful and obscure land,  
land of confusion and gloom  
where light itself is darkness.**

6. Zophar (11:1-20)

**<sup>1</sup>Zophar from Naamat spoke up:**

**<sup>2</sup>Should such palaver remain without a response?**

**Shouldn't the charlitan be put straight?**

**<sup>3</sup>Should your babble leave your listeners silent?**

**Are you to go on mocking and no one contradict you?**

**<sup>4</sup>For you dared to say, 'My teaching is clear, and I am pure in your sight.'**

**<sup>5</sup>The truth is, that God can speak to you, and open his lips to respond to you:**

**<sup>6</sup>he will teach you the secrets of wisdom, exquisitely subtle as they are, and you will know**

**that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.**

**<sup>7</sup>Are you claiming to understand the deep things of God, or to grasp the perfection of the Almighty?**

**<sup>8</sup>It is higher than heaven – what can you do?**

**Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?**

**<sup>9</sup>Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.**

**<sup>10</sup>If he makes himself present, and imprisons, and summons for judgment, who can hinder him?**

**<sup>11</sup>He knows those who are worthless; when he sees iniquity, will he not scrutinise it?**

**<sup>12</sup>It is easier for a wild ass to be born tame, than for a stupid person to think straight.**

Zophar is doing what is recommended by the proverb:

Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes.

– Proverbs 26:5

'Pure' (verse 4)? Zophar is about to point out that Job couldn't be innocent – what is happening to him is proof of that; nor does what Job is saying make any sense. It is this latter point that Zophar concentrates on as he goes on to speak of wisdom (verses 5-6).

Basing his words on his knowledge of God's compassion, in verses 7-14 Zophar is confidently making the point that Job, in fact, is getting off lightly. He surely deserves more than he is getting.

The Psalmist prays:

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

– Psalm 139:17-18



Zophar has said that God can respond to Job and teach him wisdom (11:5). But, if Job wants to approach God he needs to purify his life. It is for him as it is for those who want to enter into God's presence in the temple.

YHWH who may abide in your tent?  
Who may dwell on your holy hill?  
Those who walk blamelessly, and do  
what is right, and speak the truth from  
their heart.

– Psalm 15:1-2

Who shall ascend the hill of YHWH?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?  
Those who have clean hands and pure  
hearts, who do not lift up their souls to  
what is false.

– Psalm 24:3-4

The matter is quite clear to this theologian. If Job found innocence through acknowledging his sins and repenting, life would be so peaceful. For us, the trouble with this line of argument (verse 15) is that we witnessed the opening scenes. We know that God knows that Job is innocent. The author is trying to get us to question the 'wisdom' that links suffering with sin, and to beware of theology that is abstract and not based on experience.

What Zophar is saying is not without merit, but it requires a deepening of experience and a wisdom that Zophar, for all his confidence, has no grasp of.

Hope (verse 18) is a recurring theme. Eliphaz made the point that integrity of life is the basis of hope (4:6). Bildad stated that there is no hope for those who are godless (8:13). Job prayed that God would give him the death he hoped for (6:8). He goes on to say that he has lost all hope (7:6), and Zophar is about to say that there is no substance in the hope of the wicked (11:20).

**<sup>13</sup>If you direct your heart rightly,  
you will stretch out your hands  
toward him.**

**<sup>14</sup>If iniquity is in your hand, put it  
far away,  
do not let wickedness reside  
in your tent.**

**<sup>15</sup>Surely then you will lift up  
your face without blemish;  
in difficulties you will not be  
afraid.**

**<sup>16</sup>You will forget your misery;  
you will remember it as waters  
that have come and gone.**

**<sup>17</sup>And your life will be brighter  
than the noonday;  
its darkness will be like the  
morning.**

**<sup>18</sup>You will be at peace, confident in  
your hope.  
You will understand and take your  
rest in safety.**

**<sup>19</sup>You will lie down, and no one  
will make you afraid;  
many will entreat your favour.**

**<sup>20</sup>But the eyes of the wicked fail;  
they see no escape,  
their hope is a passing breath.**

## End of Act One

The curtain falls on Act One.

In the upper stage God is present, watching. In the opening scenes we witnessed a dialogue between God and the Satan, and we know that Job is innocent, that his suffering is a test, not a punishment.

After the opening scenes the upper stage is in darkness, but we know that God is watching, watching us as much as he is watching Job. The action takes place on the lower stage.

Centre stage is Job and he is suffering terribly. More importantly for us he is questioning his suffering, with passion and with powerful arguments.

His three friends between them have presented all the traditional arguments in support of the notion that suffering is punishment from God for sin. They speak confidently, but we know from the opening scenes that their explanation, given with complete confidence, is, in fact, wrong. We should be questioning our own assumptions.