

Job's Speeches

- 1) Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz, while in the concentration camp saw a strange sight: three rabbis who decided to stage a trial of God for allowing such terrible suffering of his people. This led him to write the play *The Trial of God*, in which three Jewish travelers find themselves in an inn in Shamgorod, the site of a recent bloody pogrom. Berish, a Jewish innkeeper based loosely on Job, lost his sons and wife in the pogrom, and had to witness the brutal gang rape of his daughter. Berish and his guests, like the rabbis, put God on trial, as a murderous mob begins to gather outside. In the attached excerpt, the innkeeper describes his fear of God to one of the travelers.

What differences and similarities do you see between Berish's response to suffering and Job's?

- 2) The following verses shed some light on Job's attitude toward God:

- "O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances!" (6:2)
- "I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." (7:11)
- "My face is red with weeping, and deep darkness is on my eyelids" (16:16)
- "Even when I cry out, 'Violence!' I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice (19:7)
- "I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." (23:4)
- "Let the Almighty answer me!" (31:35)

Is Job angry with God? Is it ever okay to be angry at God? Does Job cross any lines?

- 3) Job's friends, defending God's just nature, believe that Job must have sinned and they encourage him, first sympathetically, then derisively, to repent. How does Job respond?
- 4) Job wistfully recalls a time when "the friendship of God was upon my tent; when the Almighty was still with me." Now his unmerited suffering's brought him to the point where he is terrified that God will murder him (23:14-17). What does he say to God? Does Job think God is just?
- 5) Part 3 of Handel's *Messiah*, which focuses on the resurrection, begins with these Scriptural references:

*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.
And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.* (Job 19: 25-26)

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. (I Corinthians 15: 20)

The Hebrew word translated "redeemer" is also translated "champion" or "vindicator". This word refers to "the individual responsible to aid extended family members whose inheritance as in danger of being lost, primarily because of death without an heir to carry on the family name, or in some instance because poverty had forced the sale of the family property" (*New International Biblical Commentary: Job*). Eugene Peterson in his *Message* and the *NRSV Study Bible* writers see this as a reference to God, who is referred to elsewhere as "redeemer" (Isa 43:1, 14; Ps 69:19, 103:4). The

NRSV also sees God in the role of the “avenger of blood” (Num 35:19; Deut 19:6). Others believe it can’t be God, whom Job considers an adversary.

Read Job 19. Who is Job referring to? The Messiah? What is he hoping this Redeemer will do for him? Is that what Jesus does for us?

6) What’s Job pleading for in 14:13-19?

7) If 14:13-19 betrays a hint of hope, Job statement, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (19:25) goes much further, in what Diogenes Allen calls, “the most momentous expression of faith in the entire series of poems, perhaps in the entire Old Testament.”¹ This is in stark contrast to passages like, “See, he will kill me; I have no hope; but I will defend my ways to his face.” (13:15)².

Is Job hopeful? If you were suffering Job-like calamity, should you hope, and for what?

8) What do you think of Allen’s reading of the Redeemer passage:

Abruptly Job turns from the consolation he seeks in the hope that he will be vindicated in the distant future by a change in people’s attitudes toward suffering. He turns from all earthly hope... With [his final plea] he breaks out of the shell of the traditional explanation of suffering as deserved – indeed, from all explanations of suffering.

Job has found his way home the hard way – through the path of being reduced to nothing but his bare skin and bones. In that condition – when he suddenly abandons all claims to establish his own good name, all claims to justice – he is raised by God’s Spirit to the soaring conviction that no matter what happens to him, he belongs to God, and God will bring him to God’s presence in glory. (p. 62)

9) Job’s friends fail to acknowledge that there are many reasons for suffering:

Some suffering is given in order to chastise and correct a person for wrongful patterns of life (as in the case of Jonah imperiled by the storm), some suffering is given ‘not to correct past wrongs but to prevent future ones’ (as in the case of Joseph sold into slavery), and some suffering has no purpose other than to lead a person to love God more ardently for himself and so discover the ultimate peace and freedom. The suffering of Job, in Gregory [the Great]’s view, belonged to this last category.³

Is Gregory the Great right? Could *any* of these really justify such extreme suffering? Or the suffering endured by countless around the world every day?

Fun quote: “The Lord had not yet died, and the athlete of the Church saw his redeemer rising from the grave.” (Jerome, *Jo. Hier.*, 30)

1 *Theology for a Troubled Believer*, p. 62.

2 Some MSS read, “Though he kill me, yet will I trust him.” Most scholars see this as a later modification, not the original.

3 Tim Keller, *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, p. 47.

MENDEL (a traveler): I am not afraid.

BERISH (the innkeeper): You're lying, you're a liar

MENDEL: Not I, innkeeper. Not I.

BERISH: "And God in all this?" Have you no fear of God – not even of God?

MENDEL: What if I told you that I fear *for* God? You seem to confuse fear and awe. I am in awe of God, but I do not fear Him.

BERISH: I don't believe you. When the whole world is our enemy, when God Himself is on the side of the enemy – when God *is* the enemy, how can one not be afraid? Admit it: you do fear Him. You neither love nor worship Him. All He evokes in you is fear.

MENDEL: Man steals and kills, but it is God you fear?

BERISH: Men and women are being beaten, tortured and killed – how can one *not* be afraid of Him? True, they are victims of men. But the killer kill in His name. Not all? True, but numbers are unimportant. Let one killer kill for His glory and He is guilty. Every man who suffers or causes suffering, every woman who is raped, every child who is tormented implicates Him. What, you need more? A hundred or a thousand? Listen: either He is responsible or He is not. If He is, let's judge Him; if He is not, let Him stop judging us.

Berish later says in Act 3, responds to Sam, who plays the role of Satan in the play:

SAM: We would deeply appreciate it if the prosecutor would spell out his accusations! What exactly are the charges?

MENDEL (to Berish): Prosecutor?

BERISH: I-Berish, Jewish innkeeper at Shamgorod – accuse Him of hostility, cruelty and indifference. Either He dislikes His chosen people or He doesn't care about them – period! But then, why has He chosen us – why not someone else, for a change? Either He knows what's happening to us, or He doesn't wish to know! In both cases, He is... He is... guilty!

Leader's Preface:

In the previous two studies we talked about how important Job is, since we will all go through suffering, and since it takes us into the mind of someone who previously was close to God, but for whom God feels now light years away. Some denigrate the book of Job for not giving a clear answer to innocent suffering by those who fail to recognize that it is not trying to do that. That's called a theodicy, and it's crucial to see that in Job, God never directly answers Job's questions, never gives a direct explanation for suffering. What Job does offer us is maybe more important: God responds to Job, and Job actually emerges with his faith intact, which is amazing given his suffering.

In a sermon on Job (*Where All Hope Lies*, p. 10). Jim Van Tholen quotes a passage from a book by concentration camp survivor Elie Wiesel – a quotation from Wiesel autobiography, *Night*:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Wiesel can truly be said to have suffered and we may not be surprised that he turned from God. But he's not the only one to suffer like that. Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist who spent three years in a Nazi death camp, emerged with his faith intact, and described how the trauma of the camps, rather than turning people from faith, often turned unbelievers toward God.

We know that Job never turns away from God, and we know that in the end he is satisfied and his faith strengthened. One of the great things this book has to offer us is the chance to look into Job's mind when he is at his lowest, to try to see what seeds might have contributed to saving his faith

Excerpts to Read: Job 29, 30, 31. (To save time, skip 31:5-28.)