

JOB

*How should we respond to suffering?*

SETTING

Uncertain

KEY VERSE

*"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

42:5-6

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**CONTENTS**

[INTRODUCTION 3](#_Toc124584374)

[3 MODERN VIEWS OF HOW GOD RUNS THE WORLD 4](#_Toc124584375)

[WHEN? 4](#_Toc124584376)

[WHERE? 4](#_Toc124584377)

[STRUCTURE 6](#_Toc124584378)

[HOW DOES JOB VIEW GOD? 6](#_Toc124584379)

[SATAN (1:6)? 7](#_Toc124584380)

[WHAT’S THE BOOK ABOUT? 8](#_Toc124584381)

[THE DIALOG (CH. 3-27) 8](#_Toc124584382)

[CH. 9-10 8](#_Toc124584383)

[12:9 9](#_Toc124584384)

[ELIHU (CH. 32-37) 9](#_Toc124584385)

[GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-39) 10](#_Toc124584386)

[GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-39) 10](#_Toc124584387)

[GOD’S QUESTION (40:2) 11](#_Toc124584388)

[JOB’S 1ST REPLY (40:4-5) 11](#_Toc124584389)

[40:8-14 12](#_Toc124584390)

[BEHEMOTH (40:15-24) 12](#_Toc124584391)

[LEVIATHAN (CH. 41) 12](#_Toc124584392)

[WHAT’S GOD’S POINT? 13](#_Toc124584393)

[GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-41) 14](#_Toc124584394)

[JOB’S 2ND REPLY (42:1-6) 14](#_Toc124584395)

[“I AM COMFORTED IN DUST AND ASHES”? 42:6 15](#_Toc124584396)

[42:7-8 15](#_Toc124584397)

[WHAT’S THE MESSAGE? 15](#_Toc124584398)

[THE THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB 16](#_Toc124584399)

[JESUS IN JOB 17](#_Toc124584400)

[HOPE AFTER DEATH FOR JOB? 17](#_Toc124584401)

[DO WE FEAR GOD FOR NOTHING? 17](#_Toc124584402)

## INTRODUCTION

There are different opinions about how historical the person Job is and whether the book should be taken as history or not. This impacts the interpretation. It is a book of wisdom and is not among the historical books, and the places named at the beginning can be interpreted in several ways. Job probably lived, perhaps in Abraham's time, although the book may be a later poetic "dramatization" of the events. It is about how the God-fearing Job reacts to seemingly innocent suffering and how his friends - wise in the eyes of the world - try to help him.

Chapters 1-2 open with Satan accusing Job: "Job only fears God because God blesses him." God allows Satan to test Job on this and allows Job to lose everything. Three of Job's friends come to comfort him in all his misery.

Neither Job nor his friends are Israelites. His three friends represent the best of the thinking about God and suffering in their time and set forth the traditional "retribution" theology that we find especially in the Law of Moses and Proverbs: "It goes well with the godly and bad with the wicked." Therefore, they believe that Job must have sinned since he suffers as he does. But Job holds fast to his righteousness. So if the friends' theology is correct, and Job has not sinned, does that mean that God is the one who is not just?

The dialogue between Job and his friends goes on and on for many chapters and takes us nowhere. Was there perhaps a point the readers should see? That this traditional wisdom gets us nowhere in a situation like with Job. The accusation from Satan is also answered with Job not asking for what he lost, but to be declared innocent of the sufferings.

In chapter 32, Elihu suddenly appears. He is also not an Israelite but has a Hebrew name. He is on the side of the other three against Job but is angry with them for giving up, and he is angry with Job for questioning God's justice. He is probably more right than the other three, but interestingly, no one commented or responded to what he said, not even God in the end.

When God finally answered in chapter 38, he asked a lot of questions back to Job, but He did not come up with a list of Job's sins. God's point seems to be that only He sees the whole picture and knows how the world should be run.

Although Job has asked God many desperate questions, he did not say anything that offends God, according to chapter 42. Job never learnt about the bet with Satan, but he was still satisfied by God's answer. Job does not see everything, but he sees God, and that is enough for him. It seems that God is telling Job to trust in his wisdom and character rather than look for the cause of his suffering, and this is what calms Job down.

Job was righteous and suffered without cause, but he was not sinless. Jesus was sinless but still suffered. In addition, He makes it possible for the unjust to become righteous because He who was righteous suffered unjustly. God became part of our suffering to finally remove all suffering.

### 3 MODERN VIEWS OF HOW GOD RUNS THE WORLD

1. God cannot do all the good he would want to do because of the ongoing spiritual war.
2. God is sovereign and ordains suffering. He has a reason for everything.
3. God is sovereign but doesn’t ordain suffering. He allows suffering as part of the fallen world.

### WHEN?

*“There was a man in the land of Uz…”* (1:1). The language appears to indicate that it is a historical fact rather than fiction (compare with 2 Sam 12:1 and Jer 26:20).

* 2 Sam 12:1: *“There were two men in a city…” (parable)*
* Jer 26:20: *“There was another man…” (historical)*

Ezek 14:20 and James 5:11 seems to refer to Job as a real person:

* *“…even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness.”* Ezek 14:20
* *“You have heard of the endurance of Job…”* James 5:11

Suggestions from 2000 - 300 B.C.

Probably an old story anyway, even if the book was written later.

### WHERE?

Uz is connected with Edom in Jer 25:20 and Lam 4:21, but with Aram in Gen 10:23 and 22:21. Gen 36:28 mentioned a person whose name is Uz - who lived in Edom. “The East” (1:3) can be anything east of the Jordan river. The book mentions attacks by the Sabeans (1:15) from South Arabia and the Chaldeans (1:17), who lived by the Tigris. We don’t know if Job was an Israelite outside of Israel or if he just believed in the God of Israel.

*“We therefore adopt the position that, though Job himself may have been a real person who actually lived, the rest of the book is a literary work of art providing a wisdom discussion that is framed by extremes... This is important for some readers because it is easy to get distracted by this picture of a God who is “making wagers with the devil” or has no knowledge of what Satan is doing or of what motivates Job’s righteousness. Instead we should take this scenario as a hypothetical one: What if we imagine...? In this view, the truth of the message of Job is preserved while potential concerns about the nature of God are avoided... Whether we label it a thought experiment or simply a hypothetical scenario built around extremes, we can encounter the God-given message of the text undistracted from incidental curiosities and without the angst that comes with wondering why God killed Job’s children.”* John Walton & Tremper Longman III

*“In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”* Proverbs 14:23

#### Wrong interpretation:

#### “I am guaranteed a profit if I work hard. Nothing can go wrong then.”

*“The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.”* Proverbs 10:22

#### Wrong interpretations:

#### “If you’re poor, you can’t complain. You’re just lazy.”

#### “All rich people are blessed by God. No poor people are blessed by God.”

* “God likes Norway more than all poor countries.”

*“The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.”* Proverbs 22:4

Wrong interpretation:

* *“If somebody dies young, the reason is that he didn’t fear God.”*

### STRUCTURE

Ch. 1-2 Prolog. God says that Job is blameless.

Ch. 3-27 Dialog. God is just. The Retribution Principle (“you get what you deserve”). Job’s righteousness.

Ch. 28 Wisdom. Poetry. The voice of the author as a transition to the speeches?

Ch. 29-31 Job’s final speech. Ends with demanding that God answers (31:35).

Ch. 32-37 Elihu. God can use suffering to get people’s attention. The righteous will repent, while the ungodly will not and will perish.

Ch. 38-41 God. Answers the accusations about His justice and His way of running the world. God sees everything; Job sees only a small part of it. God’s apparent injustice must be seen from a bigger perspective.

Ch. 42 Epilog. Job realizes that there is much he doesn't understand and regrets what he has said in his frustration. God still believes Job spoke the truth about Him and gave him twice as much as he had before.

### HOW DOES JOB VIEW GOD?

What motivates his behavior described in 1:4-5?

*“His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom.”* 1:4-5

Many translations have past tenses in 3:25. NIV: *“What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.”* Did Job fear that this would happen?

Does 7:17-20 and 10:5-7 tell us anything?

*“What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, you who see everything we do? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?”* 7:17-20

*“Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a strong man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin — though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?”* 10:5-7

*“For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.”* (31:23) Context: His good deeds. Wrong motives? Motivated by fear of punishment from God if he did not do good deeds?

### SATAN (1:6)?

Most translations: *"Satan"*

NLT: *"the Accuser"*

JPS Tanakh (1985), Young’s Literal Translation (1898): *“the Adversary”*

LXX: *“diabolos”*

**The same word is also used in the Bible about the following humans:**

* David (1 Sam 29:4)
* The sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam 19:22)
* The human enemies of Solomon (1 Kings 5:4)
* Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 11:14)
* Rezon the son of Eliada (1 Kings 11:23, 25)
* A wicked man (Ps 109:6: parallelism. LXX: diabolos)

**It is also applied to heavenly beings:**

* 14 times in Job with definite articles throughout
* About the angel of the Lord in Num 22:22, 32 (it may be meant as a verb, as in v. 32, where the NIV translates it as "to oppose you".)
* About an adversary/Satan (LXX: diabolos) who incited David in 1 Chron 21:1
* 3 times in Zech 3:1-2, with definite articles

*“Job is in it for the blessings. remove the blessings and you’ll see that he doesn’t fear you.”* Satan’s accusation (1:9-11)

### WHAT’S THE BOOK ABOUT?

If it’s about the problem of evil and why the innocent suffer, why doesn’t God answer that clearly? The question is, “Why is Job righteous?” not “Why is Job suffering?” Is the book more about the reasons for righteousness? The purpose of the bet between God and Satan is to show that Job’s suffering is not the result of anything he has done. Sometimes suffering comes for no reason but simply to justify God’s claim that humans can serve him without thought of rewards.

*“Job is the test case for considering how God runs the world and how we should think about God when life goes haywire.”* John Walton & Tremper Longman III

## THE DIALOG (CHAPTERS 3-27)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ELIPHAZ** | **BILDAD** | **ZOPHAR** |
| Mystic | Traditionalist | Rationalist |
| Personal experience | Wisdom of the ages | Black & white system |
| Human experience | Human tradition | Human merit |

The dialog (Ch. 3-27)

1st round Advice. Generalizations + exhortations

2nd round Focus on the fate of the wicked. They insult and humiliate Job with insinuations.

3rd round Direct accusation of Job

They play the role of Satan’s philosophical representatives.

## CH. 9-10

9:17: He thinks that God is not doing the right thing.

9:22: *“he destroys both the blameless and the wicked”*. God doesn't really care about who is blameless or not, since Job is blameless and suffering.

9:23: *“When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.”* Takes it even further…

9:24: *“The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the eyes of its judges-- if it is not he, who then is it?”* God actively prevents justice from happening.

9:28: *“I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent (free me from the criminal charge by a verdict of not guilty).”* Because he thinks God is unjust.

9:29-31: *“I shall be condemned; why then do I labor in vain?”* God has made up his mind regardless of Job's lifestyle.

10:1-8: God should know better than to make Job suffer when he knows that Job is not guilty.

## 12:9

*“Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?”* 12:9

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?”* 12:7-9

*“…so that all may see and know, all may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.”* (Is 41:20)

Only twice in the OT do we find this exact phrase.

YHWH is used only here in the dialogue section. (Elsewhere: Ch. 1-2, 28:28, Ch. 38-42.)

Possibly a quote from Is 41:20, which would date Job to the 8th century as the earliest.

## ELIHU (CH. 32-37)

Redefines the retribution principle to also include discipline beforehand. 36:8-17

If the righteous suffer, God wants to show them their transgressions and arrogance (v. 9) and to open their ears to instruction and to repent (v. 10).

If they listen, they will return to prosperity (v. 11). If they don’t listen, they will perish (v. 12). Discipline or punishment.

God is calling Job out of his situation (v. 16), but Job is focusing on the wrong things (v. 17). He is in danger of perishing like an ungodly person.

Represents “the prophetic wisdom”. He is young and gets wisdom through revelation, not age or experience. Still, he comes up too short.

## GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-39)

God speaks only to Job, but God’s answer is not what Job asked for (either an indictment [e.g., 31:35] or a declaration of innocence [e.g., 23:7]).

*"let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment [a formal charge or accusation] in writing.”* 31:35

*"There [in his dwelling] the upright can establish their innocence before him"* 23:7a

*"Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?"* 38:2

Has Job made God’s way of running the world less clear because he doesn't have all the knowledge needed? This cannot contradict 42:7, where God says that Job spoke rightly about him.

The natural order is parallel to the moral order of the universe. Job sees only a small part of the world; God sees the full picture.

## GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-39)

28:23-24: Only God knows where wisdom is because he sees everything under the heavens.

38:36-37: *"Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?"*

39:26-27: *"Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high?"*

God answers another question that has been in the background throughout the book: What is the source of wisdom? God alone is wise.

God doesn’t run the world according to justice, but according to wisdom.

## GOD’S QUESTION (40:2)

As in a court case, God is inviting Job to reply to what He has just said. God is answering Job’s wish. Job has clearly said that he wants to contend with God and argue his case with him.

**“contend” has been used several times by Job during the dialogue, as in:**

13:6 *"listen to the pleadings of my lips"*

13:19 *"Who is there that will contend with me?"*

23:6 *"Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power?"*

31:35 *"Oh, that I had the indictment [formal charge] written by my adversary!"*

**“argue”:**

13:3  *"I desire to argue my case with God"*

13:15 *"I will defend my ways to his face"*

23:7 *"There an upright person could reason with him"*

## JOB’S 1ST REPLY (40:4-5)

*“See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further.”* 40:4-5

Is this only humility? Then why does God continue?

Job knew all the time that the power of God overwhelms anyone who tries to stand before him (9:12-15, 13:20-22, 23:15-16). Job doesn’t come up with a reply, maybe because it is impossible. But he does not admit anything or take anything back. He could be saying, “I rest my case.” He has said all he wants to say and invites God to go on.

## 40:8-14

v. 8: God gets close to answering Job directly…

*“Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?”* 40:8

Job has previously said: *“Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me.”* 27:5

**vv. 11-13:**

Can Job judge all evil? Could he do a better job than God in running the world?

*“Only one with power like God and in physical control of the universe can have the authority to make judgments in the moral sphere also. Vindication of a human being is a divine task, and Job has been trying to do God’s task by demanding vindication.”* David Clines

## BEHEMOTH (40:15-24)

Plural of ‘animal’ or ‘cattle’. Used only here about a single animal. Could mean a large land animal. God made it (v. 15); it’s very strong (vv. 16-18). *Behema* was mentioned first in Gen 1:24 (v. 19), it’s not frightened (v. 23) and can’t be domesticated (v. 24).

Real or mythical? Fancy poetry or literal?

Hippo since the 17th century. In Ugaritic literature, the 7-headed dragon appears with El’s calf, Atik.

## LEVIATHAN (CH. 41)

A crocodile? Modern Hebrew: Whale (NEB)

Seven-headed sea monster called Lotan/Litan in Canaanite mythology. A common symbol of chaos in the Ancient Near East.

*“You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.”* Ps 74:13-14

*“Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both* *small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.”* Ps 104:25-26

*“On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.”* Is 27:1

## WHAT’S GOD’S POINT?

1. That only He can control the hippo and the crocodile?
2. That only He can control the chaos monsters (even though they don’t really exist…)?
3. That the world is amazing but dangerous?
4. Warfare view: There is still chaos, and evil does not come from God, as Job thinks, or from human behavior, as his friends claim. God is in continuous combat with evil, as manifested in these chaotic creatures. Even God has to handle them carefully. It takes all His craft and power to keep them in subjection and prevent them from destroying all that He has achieved.
5. Symbols of Job and God?

*Retrieved from John Walton & Tremper Longman III*

After the description of Behemoth, the only point made concerns its stability in surging waters (40:23). Behemoth cannot be moved, and Leviathan cannot be challenged. Humans should respond to raging rivers with security and trust (as Behemoth does) and should not think that they can domesticate or challenge God (like with Leviathan, who is inferior to God).

Job is explicitly compared to Behemoth at the initial introduction to the beast (40:15). *“Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you…”* Job 40:15

Yahweh does not speak of Job doing anything to Behemoth, but when the discussion switches to Leviathan, the first 8 verses use the 2nd person. This switch suggests that Leviathan is to be compared to God (41:3,10-11,34).

*"Will it keep begging you for mercy? Will it speak to you with gentle words?"* 41:3

*"No one is fierce enough to rouse it. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me."* 41:10-11

*"It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud."* 41:34

Job needs to find stability in rough waters and have more respect for Yahweh. This is the message of the book and therefore is appropriately found in God’s last speech.

## GOD’S ANSWER (CH. 38-41)

God has complete control over the world He created.

Although God’s answer is surprising and not a literal reply, it seems like God holds nothing against Job. Which means Job was right about his blamelessness.

An explanation of why this happened to Job would destroy the purpose of the book: Suffering can happen for no good reason, and we might never know why it happened.

## JOB’S 2ND REPLY (42:1-6)

v. 2: He already knows that God can do all things, but now he also knows that God has a purpose with all that he does.

*"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* 42:2

v. 3: Repeats God’s question in 38:2. Admits he spoke out of limited knowledge.

*“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?”* 38:2

*"You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."* 42:3

v. 4: Quotes God in 38:3 and 40:7. He didn’t answer last time, but now he will.

*"You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."* 42:4-6

God: *"Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."* 38:3

God: *"Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me."* 40:7

5: Job doesn’t get to see everything, but he sees God.

v. 6: *“therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*

*“Therefore I retract [withdraw (a statement or accusation) as untrue or unjustified.], And I repent in dust and ashes.”* (NASB, NJB)

*“Therefore I melt away…”* (he will die because he has seen God)

## “I AM COMFORTED IN DUST AND ASHES”? 42:6

2:11 *"They met together to go and console and comfort him."*

7:13 *"My bed will comfort me, then you scare me with dreams."*

16:2 *"Miserable comforters are you all"*

21:34 *"How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?"*

29:25 *"I lived like a king among his troops, like one who comfort mourners."*

42:6 *"I am comforted in dust and ashes."*

42:11 *"They showed him sympathy and comforted him"*

## 42:7-8

*“for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”* 42:7b

The friends’ view of God led them astray, while Job’s view was right. Job’s theology wasn’t correct, but he did not reject God even when his theology told him he should. It seems like God was not insulted by anything Job said.

*In the Hebrew text, it says “spoken to”*. One interpretation is that this only refers to 42:1-6 and not everything Job said. His friends never said anything to God; they only talked about Him.

## WHAT’S THE MESSAGE?

The book does not give us a reason for suffering. The bet with the devil is not the reason for the suffering in the world. The bet shows that there does not have to be a reason.

The book doesn’t offer relief from why we suffer, but it offers relief from the quest for explanations and from the suspicion that God has let us down or even become our enemy.

Not a solution to the problem of evil, but an answer to how we should respond when suffering occurs.

Only God is wise and sees the full picture, including the whole course of history. He does not need to be defended; He wants to be trusted, even when we don’t understand.

Talk to God; don’t become bitter and silent. The comfort is in the relationship.

## THE THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF JOB

*Retrieved from John Walton & Tremper Longman III*

1. Suffering is the lot of all humanity.
2. Suffering is part of creation. The nervous system for protection means we can feel pain. Capability to love means being vulnerable to pain. “Normal” cannot be defined as a life free of suffering.
3. Suffering is not intrinsically [in an essential or natural way] connected to sin.
4. Suffering should lead us into the arms of God’s love. The Bible’s strongest counsel is to trust in God’s wisdom. That must be enough.
5. Suffering is an opportunity to deepen our faith. If we commit to honoring God in whatever circumstances. Rom 5:3. Not a reason for suffering but a response.

 *"we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance"* Rom 5:3

1. Suffering is an opportunity to participate in Christ’s suffering (Matt 5:10-12) and the blessings of being persecuted (2 Tim 3:12).

 *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Matt 5:10-12

 *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* 2 Tim 3:12

## JESUS IN JOB

Job was righteous and suffered for no reason, but he was not sinless. Jesus was sinless but still suffered. In addition, he makes it possible for the unrighteous to become righteous because he who was righteous suffered unrighteously.

Job did not find rest in the middle of his suffering, only after he was restored. We can find a deeper rest in Jesus even in the middle of the chaos around us.

God took part in our suffering to fix things. He embraced and absorbed the undeserved consequences of all evil.

Only God is wise, and Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:30, etc.). We can have a relationship with God’s wisdom.

*"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."* 1 Cor 1:30

## HOPE AFTER DEATH FOR JOB?

3:13, 17-19: Death as peaceful rest, sleep

3:20-22: Death as something to look forward to when suffering

10:21-22: Death as darkness

14:12 *“so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep.”*

Nobody ever suggests that Job will be rewarded in eternity, even if he is suffering now, and that justice will be done after death.

## DO WE FEAR GOD FOR NOTHING?

1. Do we “fear” God at all? Do we have the “healthy respect” the Bible talks about? Do we realize what God is saying about Himself in His speeches?
2. What if we lost all evidence of God’s blessing in our lives and had no hope of heaven? Would we still remain faithful to God and serve Him with our lives? Do we fear Him because He is God or because we think we will be rewarded for our relationship with Him?

*“but if heaven never was promised to me… it’s been worth just having the Lord in my life.”* Andrae Crouch