

Job's Anguish and God's Response
Job 3 and 38

Turn to Job 3. We will read the whole chapter.

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said:

*“May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’
That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it.
May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more;
may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm it.
That night—may thick darkness seize it;
may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months.
May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it.
May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.
May its morning stars become dark;
may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn,
for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes.*

*“Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?
Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?
For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest
with kings and rulers of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins,
with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver.
Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child,
like an infant who never saw the light of day?
There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest.
Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout.
The small and the great are there, and the slaves are freed from their owners.*

*“Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul,
to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure,
who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?
Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?
For sighing has become my daily food; my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.”*

1 Job's Cry in Three Parts

Job 3 is a cry of anguish and pain and huge distress. It shocks us, because in Job 1–2 we saw only Job's resolve not to turn away from God. In Job 1–2 he seems to have conquered his pain already. He was more tranquil. He tore his robe and shaved his head, but nothing like this. This outburst is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of healthy humanity. He's raw with physical and emotional pain. He makes no attempt to hold it in, nor should he.

Job won't curse God and he won't curse people, but he will curse one day of God's creation, the day he was born. Actually, Job does not curse that day. Did you notice that? The narrator says "Job cursed the day of his birth," but Job cannot quite bring himself to do that. He says, "May those who curse days curse that day."

The narrator does this on purpose, first telling us that Job cursed that day, then giving us Job's actual words so we can see that Job himself does not curse that day. However, Job does think that day should not have been allowed. That whole day should never have occurred, it should have been blotted out. Job did not actually curse it, but he thinks someone should.

Then, his second complaint, Job should not have been allowed to survive birth. Since his day was not blotted out, he should have died at birth, if this is how his life would go. It would have been better if he had died at birth.

And lastly, even now he should not be allowed to live. Why is light given to those in misery? Why is life given to those who long for death that does not come? Why is life given to those for whom death is a treasure they cannot find? Job's body and soul are both full of pain.

2 What Was Job's Underlying Pain

The core of Job's pain here is not any one of his particular losses, nor all his losses together, but rather that God used to be his friend, and now God was his enemy. Through no doing of Job's, and for no reason that Job could see, God had become his enemy. Job had lost God.

In Job 29:2 we listen to Job summarize his loss: *"How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone on my head, and by his light I walked through darkness! Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me, and my children were around me.*

Job mentions his children, but mostly it's God. God watched over him, God was his light, God's face shone on him. The Almighty was still with him. In Job 30:20 Job tells how different it is now: *I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm. I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living.*

That's why Job wants his day blotted out of creation, that's why he says he should not have been allowed to survive birth, and that's why he should not be allowed to live any longer. He used to have God, and then he lost God. But for all this, Job will not turn his back on God, he will not curse God, he will not stop seeking God.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Job's suffering persuaded him that God had forsaken him, and that was the essence of Job's pain. Jesus was quoting Psalm 22, a regular part of Israelite worship. Many Israelites over the years had said that to God. Why have you forsaken me? Who of us in pain does not think God has forsaken us?

At the end of Job 3, Job says: "*What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me.*" Job was a righteous man. Would that protect him from tragedy? Was he righteous enough to guarantee safe passage through life? We all try to protect ourselves from trouble. Job did too, but was not sure it would work. Who knows what God will do? "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me."

Can a person be righteous enough to be certain that God would shield the person from all harm? That's a question the book of Job considers, and the answer is no, not possible. The most righteous person on earth can *not* count on safe passage through life.

Job does not think his day should have been allowed. Job says he should not have been allowed to survive birth. Job says he should not be allowed to live any more. Can you feel in all of these that he's going after God's creation?

God created light, he created night and day, he told every living thing to produce offspring after their own kind. God breathed his own life into Adam. Job wants those who curse days to curse his day, he wants his day to be deep darkness, no daylight at all. He does not want to survive birth, and he does not want life. He wants that part of creation gone.

3 How Do We Evaluate Job?

What are we to make of this? What does God think about Job going after creation like that? In Job 42, last chapter of Job, we read two lines that seem to contradict each other. (1) Job says he despises himself and he repents in dust and ashes. (2) God twice tells Job's three friends, "I am angry at the three of you because you have not spoken the truth about me as my servant Job has."

As of Job 1–2, Job has done nothing wrong. He's blameless. He need not repent for anything in Job 1–2. So, as we listen to Job through this book, we know that Job has to repent of some of the things he said afterward, beginning in chapter 3.

We also know that what Job told his friends about God was much better than what his friends were saying about God. Job told the truth about God. So keep those two in mind: Job has to repent of some things he's said, and in other things he was saying important truths about God.

4 God Responds to Job: What do you Know about My Creation? – Job 38:1–21

God waited to respond to Job, but he did. God speaks to Job twice, once in Job 38–39, and once in Job 40–41. I hope to end this series with a message on each of those. Today, we'll look a bit at 38:1–21. In this first half of Job 38, God responds to Job's complaint in Job 3. God listened carefully to what Job said, and now God speaks about that.

God's speeches at the end of Job come out of the storm. The storm is not a sign of anger or judgement, it is like the thunder and lightning on the top of Mt Sinai in Exodus when God gave the ten commands. The storm is an unmistakable sign that God is present, he's there, he's not hiding, he's here to speak to Job. It's not hostile or threatening, it's more like God's clothes.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

*“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?
Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.*

*“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?
On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—
while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?*

*“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place,
when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?*

*“Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place,
that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?
The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment.
The wicked are denied their light, and their upraised arm is broken.*

*“Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?
Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.*

“What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years!

God only asks questions. In these speeches, God gives no answers, he only asks questions. Job challenged God about a part of his creation, about his own birthday and his own life. God responds, “who obscures my plans without knowledge? Who darkens my counsel with ignorant words?”

God's point is, "Job, you don't know what you're talking about." But God never says that. God just asks Job questions that Job can't answer, so that Job can figure it out himself.

God pictures creating earth as constructing a building, with a foundation and measuring, with footings and a cornerstone. Where you there, Job, for any of this? Do you understand how this happened? Do you know on what earth's footings were set? When I did this, the morning stars sang together, and the angels shouted for joy.

Who are you to get rid of a part of this, about which you know nothing? You want the morning stars to become dark on your day, and you want no shout of joy. When I set the earth on its foundation, the morning stars sang together, and the angels shouted for joy. You take that away?

You want that day to turn to darkness, you want no light on that day, you want gloom and utter darkness to seize that day, so that you would not see trouble. When I began to create, I used thick darkness to wrap the seas, to wrap them and put them in their place, I used darkness as its garment, so that I could create light and land and life. Did you know that, Job? You want thick darkness to rule again?

You don't want light on your day, you want no morning at all. But have you ever given orders to the morning? Did you know that light puts boundaries on evil? It chases evil back into its corner?

You want death, Job. What do you know about death? Did someone show you the gates of death? Have you seen the gates of deepest darkness? Job, you say much about light and darkness. Where does light dwell? Where does darkness reside? Can you lead them to their places? Do you know the path to their dwellings, Job? Surely you know.

That's as far as we'll go. That's enough for today. We have read the first burst of Job's pain and his complaint, and we have read the beginning of God's answer, God's response to Job.

5 What Have We Seen in Job 3 and 38? Seven Things to Notice

(1) Job poured out his pain, to his close friends and to his God. He did not hold it in. Job says a lot in this book, and that is good. It never occurred to Job that there was honour or godliness in staying silent. We often want to tell no one, or if anyone, just a counsellor. Biblical people were more open. Not everything Job said was right, some was wrong, it was messy, but even there, God just asked him questions. I'm far more reserved than Job, and I wish I were more like him.

(2) God listened to Job, God was listening all along. God did not respond quickly, but when the time was right he spoke to Job. It's good for us to know that God pays close attention, he listens and he remembers. When it was time, God responded. It was not what Job wanted to hear, and it might not be what we want to hear. But God responds.

(3) God has purposes for creation, for his very good creation, and he has plans to carry out his purposes. Things that seem random and chaotic, evil and out of control, are not. His creation is good, and his purposes are good, and he's carrying it out.

(4) When we ask God why he allows the things that seem random and chaotic, he asks us questions about his good creation that we cannot answer. That's his response: he asks us questions about his good creation that we cannot answer. "Job, you can see that the big picture is good, and you know you are a part of the big picture, so you will have to trust me in your pain."

(5) The right way to talk to God about these things is in Lamentations 3, that whole chapter. The things that Job gets wrong, Lamentations 3 gets right. Too many specific phrases that occur in both Job's speeches and in Lamentations 3 for this to be accidental. We don't know which came first, but one of those writers was reading the other Scripture when they wrote. When Job repents, he repents of the ways he was not like the suffering person in Lamentations 3.

(6) Job did two important things right. First, he did not blame himself for his troubles. He refused to accept that he was responsible for these things. He kept saying he did not bring them on himself, God brought this on him. That was the truth, Job 1–2 make that clear, and God agreed completely. We are supposed to learn from this.

(7) And the second thing Job did right: he continued to trust God. Job never stopped turning to God, he never cursed God, he never walked away from God, he continued to seek God and keep the faith. That's the perseverance of Job.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we read in Luke 22 that you said this to Simon Peter: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail." Lord Jesus, we still all get sifted, and you still pray for us. Thank you for all your prayers. We're still here because you pray. Keep praying that our faith may not fail. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.