

Summary of the Dialogues of Job Concerning God

I. Concerning God's character

A. The nature of God's rule

1. Job

- a. (3:23; 19:8) God fences people in and gives no way out
- b. (6:4) God has shot poison arrows at Job
- c. (7:12) God sets a "guard" over chaotic cosmic forces in order to subdue them¹
- d. (7:17-20) God is obsessed with trying to find a flaw in human piety as a "watcher of humanity"
- e. (9:5-7) God is reckless
- f. (9:3-4, 13-14, 19, 28-31) God is stronger and wiser, and this is the reason one cannot contend with God, not because man is wrong and God is right.
 - a. The helpers of Rahab crouched beneath God²
 - b. What is one man compared to God?
 - c. God will not allow Job to be declared innocent
- g. (10:3; 30:21) God oppresses humans
- h. (10:16) God is a predator, like a lion
- i. (10:17; 19:12, 22) God is a warrior intent on destroying Job
- j. (12:13-25) God is a smarter, stronger, reckless bully
 - 1) When he withholds the waters, there is drought, when he sends them out, there is flood, nothing in between
 - 2) Both the deceived and the deceiver are his
 - 3) He takes away wisdom and makes fools of people
 - 4) He overpowers the light with deep darkness
 - 5) He makes nations great, then destroys them
- k. (13:16) The godless shall not come before God
- l. (16:9-13; 19:11) God has become Job's relentless adversary
 - 1) God has gnashed his teeth at Job
 - 2) God has given Job over to the ungodly
 - 3) God made Job a target for his archers
 - 4) God rushes at Job like a warrior repeatedly
- m. (21:7-26) God is uninvolved in human affairs
 - 1) The wicked live full, happy lives

¹ See introductory notes on mythopoeic language in Job. Job seems to buy into the ancient Near Eastern view of creation that came about after a cosmic battle.

² Rahab is a reference to a primordial chaos monster that the deity had to battle before time. For more, see the introductory notes on mythopoeic language

- 2) They wicked openly and verbally despise God
- 3) They prosperity of the wicked is their own achievement, not a reward from God
- 4) God does not punish the wicked
- 5) God storing up a father's iniquity for their children is no punishment at all for the wicked
- 6) One dies in contentment, another dies in bitterness, without God's involvement
- n. (23:13) God does what he desires
- o. (26:5-13) God has mastery over all creation
 - 1) God has complete mastery over the realm of the dead
 - 2) God stretches out Zaphon³ over chaos⁴
 - 3) God hangs the earth upon nothing⁵
 - 4) God defeated the Chaos monster, Yam, Rahab, and the serpent, and brought peace and order to the world.

2. Eliphaz

- a. (5:12) Frustrates the plans of the wicked so that they have no success
- b. (5:15-16) God saves the poor and needy from the wicked
- c. (5:17) God disciplines people, as he is supposedly doing to Job, and will restore prosperity after repentance
- d. (15:20-35) The wicked who defy God are in pain and trouble all their days
 - 1) They are destined for the sword
 - 2) They will starve
 - 3) They will live in desolate houses
 - 4) Their wealth will dry up
 - 5) Their crops will dry up
- e. (22:4-5) God does not reprove one for piety, but for specific sins
- f. (22:24-28) One who values God above all else will be prosperous

3. Bildad

- a. (8:5-6) God restores those who seek him and pray to him
- b. (8:11-15) 2 Proverbs that declare the prosperity of the

³ Usually translated, "North." However, Zaphon is not merely a directional term, but is also a symbolic term for the place of God's throne where he conducts his assembly/council. Scriptural examples: Ps 48:2; Isa 14:13-14. In Ugaritic texts, Zaphon also appears as the abode of the gods.

⁴ Or "void." The Hebrew, *tôhû*, often means chaos, waste, ruined, formless, or empty. Example of this word: Job 6:18; 12:24 refer to the wasteland, Isa 24:10 refers to the ruined city, Jer 4:23, where Jeremiah sees the earth as "*formless* and void," which is the same phrase from Gen 1:1. In context, the Jeremiah passage describes the desolation of the land as a result of divine judgment.

⁵ This cosmology stands in contrast to the view that the world was set on pillars in the deep

wicked is destroyed

- 1) The wicked are like papyrus out of a marsh, they dry up
- 2) The house of the wicked are like a spider's house, it will not stand
- c. (18:5) The light of the wicked is put out
- d. (18:8) The wicked are thrust into a net by their own feet
- e. (18:13) The wicked suffer disease - God takes away health
- f. (18:14-19) The home and family of the wicked are destroyed - God takes away legacy
- g. (18:20) People are horrified at the fate of the wicked - God takes away their honor

4. Zophar

- a. (20:5-8) The prosperity of the wicked is short lived
- b. (20:12-14) The full bellies of the wicked will turn bitter
- c. (20:23-29) God will rain down his wrath on the wicked

B. God's Justice and the nature of justice

1. Job

- a. (9:17) God multiplies Job's wounds without cause
- b. (9:22-24) God is arbitrary
 - a. Destroys both the blameless and the wicked
 - b. Mocks the calamity of the innocent
 - c. Gives the earth into the hand⁶ of the wicked
 - d. Covers the eyes of the judges of the land
- c. (10:14) God will not acquit iniquity
- d. (16:19) Oh earth do not cover my blood
 - a. Job's blood will cry for justice from the ground
 - b. There is a "witness" in heaven that will vouch for Job
 - c. This demonstrates that Job believes that justice involves vindication of a wrong suffered
- e. (19:7; 30:20) God leaves cries for justice unanswered
- f. (24:1-15) The wicked prosper at the expense of the poor and helpless, and God does nothing
 - 1) The wicked steal from the helpless
 - 2) The poor live wretched lives at the mercy of the wicked
 - 3) God favors the powerful by allowing them to oppress the weak and defenseless
- g. (27:13-23) God does not punish the wicked⁷

⁶ Hand is a metaphor for "power"

- h. (29:12-16) The nature of justice is to defend the needy
- i. (29:17) The nature of justice is to prevent wickedness by \ force if needed
- j. (30:1-8) The nature of justice is to remove the wicked from society and cast them out
- k. (30:19, 28-29) God has symbolically cast Job out of society and into the wilderness, where the rest of the wicked live⁸
- l. (30:24-25) In addition to acting on their behalf, is just to weep and feel for those in trouble

2. Eliphaz

- a. (4:7) The innocent do not perish
- b. (4:8) Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap it
- c. (5:3) Children of the wicked are far from safety

3. Bildad

- a. (8:3) God does not pervert justice
- b. (8:20) God does not reject a blameless person

C. God's Accountability

Job

- a. (9:16) If God answered a summons to court, God would not listen to Job's voice
- b. (9:19) A human cannot summon God to court
- c. (9:33) There is no umpire between Job and God to arbitrate between them
- d. (13:15, 18) Job has prepared his case against God
- e. (19:25) Job has a defender⁹ who will help bring him and God together to vindicate Job
- f. (23:6-7) An upright person can contend with God, and God would listen, and acquit
- g. (23:8-9) God hides, and therefore cannot be contended with
- h. (30:35) Job desires a "hearer" to hear his case
- i. (30:35) With a series of oaths, Job demands that God meet him in court and answer his charges

⁷ In this passage, Job appears to be contradicting his former claims, and the claims he will yet make. In 16:4, Job had said that he could speak like his friends. It irony, Job parodies his friends arguments to expose their emptiness. His friends do not speak again in the book of Job after this.

⁸ The wilderness was more than just a physical location, it was also seen as a moral location, a place where the wicked and the convicted were cast out into to live with the wild animals. Some examples appear in Ps 44:19; Isa 34:1-15; Jer 17:5-6; 50:39.

⁹ A "go'el" often translated "redeemer" is also used in legal contexts as a "defender" or "vindicator." Sometime it refers to an "avenger," depending on the context.

D. God's knowledge

1. Job
 - a. (10:4-6) God's insight is limited, so he has to search out guilt or innocence
 - b. (10:7) God knows guilt or innocence
 - c. (14:5) God knows the appointed days of a person
 - d. (31:4) Does God really know?
2. Zophar

(11:11) God knows those who are worthless
3. Eliphaz

(22:12-20) God knows all things

 - 1) God is high in the heavens and can see all things
 - 2) Quoting Job's claims, Eliphaz refutes them

II. Concerning Mankind

- A. Eliphaz
 1. (4:17) - No being, especially Humans can be righteous before God
 2. (15:14-15) Nothing, not even the heavens, are clean in God's sight, especially humans
 3. (22:2) A mortal is of no use to God
- B. Job
 1. (6:11-13) Humans are weak and helpless before God
 2. (6:29) Job is aware of no wrong in his life
 3. (7:9; 10:21) When a man dies, he does not return
 4. (9:15) Job is innocent
 5. (14:7-12) Unlike a tree that has hope after being cut down, if a man dies, there is not hope, he will not live again
 6. (17:1; 30:23) Job believes he is going to die
 7. (31:40) Job vehemently avows his innocence.¹⁰
- C. Bildad
 1. (25:4) Mortals cannot be righteous before God
 2. (25:5) Not even the stars are pure in God's sight

¹⁰ The normal formula for Semitic vows were, "May God do to me if....." without specifying the specific punishment for an unkept vow. Job departs from this conventional form and specifically states the punishment.

III. Concerning Wisdom and Knowledge

A. Eliphaz

1. (4:12-17) Comes through visions of the night
2. (15:5) Job is trying to be "crafty" in accusing Job and justifying himself
3. (15:7-9) Job has no special wisdom above his friends
4. (15:10, 17-18) The wisdom of Job's friends come from the gray haired and the sages and ancestors

B. Bildad

- (8:8-10) - Comes from ancestors that have passed down their teachings

C. Zophar

1. (11:6) Wisdom is many sided
2. (11:7-9, 12) Wisdom is so vast than humans cannot plumb its depths

D. Job

1. (12:1-3) Job's friends have no special wisdom
2. (12:7-8) Animals, rather than the sages, have more wisdom
3. (12:12) The aged do not have a greater wisdom or understanding
4. (13:12) The wisdom of Job's friends is worthless
5. (16:4-5) Job has the ability to speak the same worthless wisdom that his friends do
6. (21:29) Knowledge comes from personal observations, even from travelers on the roads
7. (28:1-28) God has hidden wisdom away from the land of the living. Wisdom is not attainable. God has instructed humans to fear him, and that is the only wisdom humans can gain.

IV. Concerning Friendship

Job

1. (6:14-23, 27) - Those who withhold kindness from a friend forsake the fear of the Almighty
 - a. Friends are afraid of a friend's calamity
 - b. Friends should stand by friends, not give up on a helpless friend to save their skin
2. (12:4) His friends whitewash with lies
3. (13:7-8) His friends speak falsely for God, presumably to escape God's wrath. In this, his friends lack integrity.

- a. (13:9) If God searches out their integrity, they may be in trouble
- b. (13:10) Job implies that when God investigates them, they will be in trouble for a dishonest heart
- 4. (13:26) God has already tried and condemned Job
- 5. (17:4) Job's friends have closed their mind to understanding
- 6. (17:5) Job's friends denounce him for reward
- 7. (19:13-19) Job's family and friends now kept their distance from Job, they abhor him

V. Elihu's Contribution

A. Concerning God's Character

- 1. The Nature of God's Rule
 - a. (33:16-21) - God terrifies and afflicts in order to turn humans away from sin and keep them from pride, and to keep them from the pit¹¹
 - b. (33:23) - God restores those he afflicts on the basis of both grace¹² and a mediator
 - c. (34:11) - God repays according to a person's deeds
 - d. (34:27-28) - God hears the cry of the afflicted and acts on their behalf against their oppressors
 - e. (35:14) - God does not answer the cry of one who denies the presence of God
 - f. (36:5) - God does not despise any
 - g. (36:7) - God keeps his eyes on the righteous
 - h. (36:22) - God is a teacher
 - i. (36:31) - God rules the earth using the weather
 - j. (36:33) - The weather reveals God's character
 - h. (37:13) - God uses the weather to rule in various ways
 - 1) For correction
 - 2) For his land, to nurture it
 - 3) For love¹³
- 2. God's Justice and the nature of Justice
 - a. (33:8-11) - God does not punish unjustly
 - b. (34:12) - God does not pervert justice
 - c. (34:17) - God does not hate justice, and is therefore qualified to govern
 - d. (34:19) - God shows no partiality to anyone because they

¹¹ Probably a reference to death

¹² It is interesting to note that in verse 24, God decides to restore a person before the prayer is offered in verse 26, which indicates that God's restoration is on the basis of his divine choice and grace.

¹³ The Hebrew word here is *hesed*, which means love, mercy, lovingkindness, or covenant loyalty

are all the work of his hands

- e. (35:12-13) - God does not answer the afflicted cry that is filled with pride
- f. (36:6) - God kills the wicked and rewards the afflicted
- g. (36:15) - God delivers the afflicted by their affliction

3. God's Accountability

- a. (33:12-15) - God does not remain silent, but speaks in ways that humans do not always perceive
- b. (34:23-24) - God does not conduct investigations or lawsuits since he already knows all the ways of humans. God destroys without investigation.
- c. (34:29) - When God is silent, no one can condemn him because he knows all things and acts justly
- d. (34:8-12) - When God punishes, he lets people know their sin so that they can turn from it and live be restored to prosperity
- e. (36:23) - No one can challenge God

4. God's Knowledge

- a. (34:21) - God sees and knows all the ways of mortals
- b. (34:22) - There is no deep darkness where one can hide

B. Concerning Mankind

- 1. (34:14-15) - The breath of life is a gift from God
- 2. (35:6-8) - Human sin and righteousness do not affect God, only other humans
- 3. (35:9-10) - Humans cry out to God, but no one questions the presence of God
- 4. (35:13) - The godless get angry in their affliction and do not cry out to God
- 5. (36:17) - Elihu says that Job is obsessed with the case of the wicked, implying that those whom Job observed as the righteous afflicted are in fact wicked

C. Concerning Wisdom and Knowledge

- 1. (32:7-8) - Comes not from years, but is inherent in the spirit of a mortal
- 2. (35:4) - It is possible for a young man to be perfect in knowledge¹⁴
- 3. (36:26) - Humans do not know God because he is infinite
- 4. (37:14-17) - Humans, such as Job, do not know how to rule the earth as a god

¹⁴ That Elihu, the youngest character in this story, arrogantly claims "perfect knowledge," is part of the irony of the book of Job. God does not condemn him, which implies that Elihu may have spoken most correctly concerning God.

5. (37:19) - Humans cannot build a case against God because of dark ignorance

D. Concerning Friendship

- (32:22) - God punishes those who flatter rather than be objective