
ESTHER; JOB

Lesson 20, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 31 January 2012

Study Guide

Prepared by David A. LeFevre

OUTLINE: ESTHER

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. Vashti's Disobedience (1) | VI. Mordecai Is Honored (6) |
| II. Esther Becomes Queen (2) | VII. Haman's Plot Revealed (7) |
| III. Introducing Haman (3) | VIII. Mordecai Promoted; Plot Is Foiled (8) |
| IV. Esther Risks Her Life (4) | IX. Jews Defeat Their Enemies; Purim (9) |
| V. Esther's Banquet and Haman's Plot (5) | X. Mordecai Second to the King (10) |

INTRODUCTION – ESTHER

The book of Esther has several things that make it unique.

1. It never uses the word "God" or "Lord" or any other reference to Deity (though the existence of God is certainly implied in the story).
2. It is the only book of the Old Testament not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.
3. A bit ironically, considering the above, there are more *Targumin* and *Midrashim* (Jewish commentaries) on Esther than any other book, and more copies of it are found in ancient manuscripts (excluding the DSS) than any other Old Testament book.
4. Martin Luther (and others) declared that there would be no loss if Esther did not exist.
5. It is one of two books in scripture named after a woman (Ruth is the other).
6. The New Testament never references Esther or her story (along with Song of Solomon, Obadiah, and Nahum).
7. Chronologically, only Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah, and Malachi are newer than Esther.
8. Its story is one that is still celebrated by the Jews today as Purim, one of only two that are not in the Mosaic Law (the other is Chanukah). During Purim, the entire story of Esther is read, with loud booing and noisemakers used by children whenever Haman's name is mentioned.

VASHTI'S DISOBEDIENCE (1)

INTRODUCTION

Life in the Persian court could not have been easy. Xerxes the king was a powerful man, waging war most of his life. He had a large harem full of

infighting and intrigue and advisors who likewise struggled for power and recognition. This chapter gives a small insight into that world, showing the courage of a woman who was willing to stand up to the king and the pressures even the king felt from his court.

COMMENTARY

1:1 **Ahasuerus**. This is the Hebrew form of the Persian spelling, *Khshayarsha*, and which we often recognize in its Greek form as *Xerxes*. Xerxes I reigned over Persia from 486-465 B.C. His father was Darius the great and his mother Atossa, who was the daughter of Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon and the man who freed the Jews to return to their homeland after their 70 years of captivity. Xerxes' son was the famous Artaxerxes. Note that Josephus, the Jewish historian of New Testament times, identified Ahasuerus with Artaxerxes, though he probably got that from the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Jewish scriptures, which most believe is a scribal error.

1:2 **in those days**. This was written after the king was dead, so sometime after 465 B.C., though probably not after about 300 B.C. because of the lack of Greek words or cultural influences.

1:2 **Shushan**. As the footnote says, this is Susa, the capital of the Persian empire. Actually, Susa was one of four capitals—the winter residence of the king. The others were Ecbatana, Babylon, and Persepolis.

1:3 **the third year of his reign**. 483 B.C.

1:4 **an hundred and fourscore days**. The one hundred eighty days does not refer to the feast in verse 3 (that story picks back up in verse 5), but the time he showed off the riches of his kingdom. This was likely a long planning and preparation phase for Xerxes' great battle with the Greeks in 481 B.C., two years after this story, during which he suffered a great defeat.

1:12 **the queen Vashti refused**. Vashti refused to humiliate herself in front of her drunken husband and his court (he was probably wanting her to appear naked or nearly so). Vashti was known in Greek as Amestris. She was the mother of Xerxes' third son, Artaxerxes, who later was king after he killed off his two older brothers, Darius and Hystaspes.

1:15 **What shall we do unto the queen**. The king was angry but it probably would have stopped there had he not been egged on by his court. They told him that if he let his wife get away with this, it would cause an uprising throughout the kingdom with other wives deciding to disobey their husbands. So the king banished her from his presence, and proclaimed that "every man should bear rule in his own house" (1:22).

Vashti's stand caused a loss of status and authority, and she apparently never saw the king again. Have you ever had to make a stand for something that was right but cost you something?

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN (2)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces us to two major characters in the story—Mordecai and Esther. Both are Jews living in 'captivity' though by now that term is irrelevant as Persia has become their home. There is a tension in the story as they tried to maintain maintained their Jewish identity and culture while at the same time trying to be good and loyal Persians.

One of the messages of Esther is that you can successfully do both.

COMMENTARY

1:1 **After these things**. Some period of time had passed since the feast and Vashti's banishment. Though the time might appear to be short, the next events are well after the wars of 481-479 B.C. in

Greece, which included the battles of Thermopylae against Leonidas of Sparta, and Salamis, where Xerxes was defeated. Shortly after that, he returned home to quench unrest in Babylon and then went back to Persia. See verse 16.

2:1 **he remembered Vashti.** Possibly the king felt some regret for his earlier decision, but his law was permanent, so he could not go back. His advisors give him the alternative of selecting a new queen.

2:3 **gather together all the fair young virgins.** It's not clear if Esther and other girls came voluntarily or were forced into this situation. Either way, they ended up at the house of Hege (later spelled Hegai), the chamberlain (eunuch), who prepared them for their meetings with the king.

2:5 **a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai.** Mordecai is the second hero of the book, weaving in and out of the story at key moments—to support Esther, to save the king, to foil Haman, etc.

2:7 **Hadassah, that is, Esther.** Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning 'myrtle,' a white or blue five-petal flower (think the star of David and the Israeli flag today). Esther means either 'star' in Persian or refers to the beautiful Babylonian love goddess, Ishtar. Either way, it was a very Persian name, thereby disguising her Jewish heritage. It is not a coincidence that the Jewish equivalent to the Relief Society is called "Hadassah."

2:7 **his uncle's daughter.** Mordecai was Esther's cousin (no word in Hebrew for cousin, hence the description here). He must have been much older than her to act as her father. We are not told how Esther's parents died.

2:9 **the maiden pleased him.** Representing her own goodness and God's blessing, Esther received favors and preferential treatment from Hegai, including beauty supplies ("things for purification"), special food ("things as belonged to her"), and servants ("seven maidens").

2:10 **not shewed her people.** She kept quiet about being a Jew.

2:11 **Mordecai walked every day.** He kept a close eye on her, even in court.

2:12 **after that she had been twelve months.** There were perhaps several reasons to have the women wait twelve months before seeing the king, some of which included teaching them proper protocol in his presence and to make sure they had no diseases that might affect him.

2:14 **the second house of the women.** Not Hegai's house any more, but that of Shaashgaz, the keeper of the concubines.

2:16 **Tebeth.** The tenth month in the Jewish calendar—December/January to us.

2:16 **seventh year of his reign.** 479 B.C., or about four years since Vashti's banishment.

2:17 **made her queen.** With little explanation here, other than he liked her best, Esther became queen.

2:22 **the thing was known to Mordecai.** Mordecai overheard a plot against the king, told Esther, and the king killed the plotting men. This foreshadows key events later in the story. Here Mordecai received no apparent reward, but the deed is recorded in the king's records.

Why did Mordecai insist that Esther use her Persian name and keep her Jewish identity a secret?

INTRODUCING HAMAN (3)

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3 we meet Haman, the ‘bad guy’ in this story. He is a close advisor to the king but quickly has a contention with Mordecai, setting up the tension that drives the rest of the story.

COMMENTARY

3:1 *Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.* Why is his descent mentioned? See 1 Samuel 15:8-33, where Saul was commanded by the Lord through Samuel to destroy the children of Amalek—man and woman, all children, and all animals. Saul did attack them but didn’t kill the king, Agag, or the best of the animals, ostensibly for sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel told him that obedience was better than sacrifice, and killed Agag himself. It is not scriptural, but Jewish tradition holds that Saul’s disobedience, which resulted in a delay in killing Agag, also resulted in Agag’s wife becoming pregnant, and hence we have Haman many years later in this story, a descendent of Agag, which irony is heightened by the fact that Mordecai is a descendant of Benjamin, as was Saul (2:5). However, many scholars today believe the term Agag may simply be a designation for ‘an enemy of the Jews,’ considering other scriptures that use it (including Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20:7-9, where the word is rendered “Gog”).

3:2 *Mordecai bowed not.* Mordecai did not bow down to Haman, as the king had commanded. Why he did this is not explained; perhaps he was strictly keeping the commandment not to bow down to anything but Jehovah (Exodus 20:5). It could also be the historical feud between the Jews and the

Agagites (see verse 1 comment above). Regardless of the reason, Haman became very angry when he found out and determined to slay not only Mordecai but all of his people (presumably because they wouldn’t bow down, either).

3:7 *Nisan . . . Adar.* Nisan was the first month of the Hebrew calendar, our March/April. Haman and his advisors cast the lot in the spring and determined that all Jews would die in Adar, the twelfth month, or the next Feb/March in our calendar. Thus the Jews had less than a year.

3:8 *not for the king’s profit.* Haman convinced the king to support his plot by disguising it as an effort to rid the kingdom of rebels and to bring wealth into the king’s treasury (presumably plundered from the Jews).

3:12 *the thirteenth day of the first month.* Nisan 13.

3:13 *the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.* Adar 13, eleven months later.

Can you remember a time when you stood by your convictions even though it was surely going to cause you problems, like Mordecai did here?

ESTHER RISKS HER LIFE (4)

INTRODUCTION

With the characters introduced and the plot in motion, we see the Lord’s hand in bringing Esther to the position she had in the king’s court. But she has a

huge challenge: if she speaks up uninvited, she will die; if she does not speak up, her people will die.

COMMENTARY

4:4 **called Esther for Hatach.** Mordecai and Esther didn't talk directly—she was in the palace and he was at the gates in mourning because of Haman's decree. But through her servant, Hatach, Esther learned of the plot from Mordecai, who told her she must intervene and speak to the king on their behalf.

4:11 **put him to death.** Esther's reply was that no one can go before the king uninvited and live, unless the king extends the golden scepter. But she hasn't seen the king in a month, and thus is uninvited.

4:14 **who knoweth.** Mordecai encouraged Esther to do the right but hard thing with the famous verse: "...who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

4:16 **fast ye for me.** Esther determined to do it and requested that all Jews join her in fasting three days to help her prepare. Like Daniel's friends, she trusted in the Lord, but said in faith, "and if I perish, I perish" (compare Daniel 3:18).

How does fasting help you prepare for difficult times in life?

ESTHER'S BANQUET AND HAMAN'S PLOT (5)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter appears at first as if it will be the climax but it is not. Instead, it sets us up for more tension as Esther hosts the king and Haman for dinner but doesn't yet reveal her true request. Through her delay, we are able to have more insight into Haman's plot and personality.

COMMENTARY

5:2 **held out to Esther the golden sceptre.** After all the tension in the previous chapter, the story almost seems anticlimactic. Esther put on her best clothing and walked into the house where Xerxes was holding court, and he extended the scepter to invite her to speak. Of course, the implication is that it was only easy because God softened the king's heart after the Jews' fasting.

5:4 **let the king and Haman come.** Not wanting to make her request in front of the entire court, Esther instead invited the king and Haman to a feast at her house.

5:8 **I will do to morrow.** Esther delayed her request one more time by inviting them both to another

banquet the next day. The reason for her delay is not clear, but it did give an opportunity in the story to confirm Haman's evil nature and to make Mordecai the hero, prefiguring what will happen when Esther later revealed Haman's plot against her people.

5:9 **joyful and with a glad heart.** Haman was glad to keep being invited to these intimate dinners with the king and queen, but his ebullient mood was ruined when he saw Mordecai, for it reminded him of his hatred. Going home, he bragged to his family and friends about his great status, but said it was all for nothing, as long as Mordecai lived.

5:14 **Let a gallows be made.** Haman's wife, Zeresh, was revealed as a plotter like her husband. She counseled him to make a "gallows" 50 cubits (about 75 feet) high on which to hang Mordecai, which he did. The word "gallows" is better translated as a tall stake on which the victim is impaled and left for all to see.

Finding the right time to break some bad news can be challenging. How does Esther's example of patience instruct us?

MORDECAI IS HONORED (6)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the tables begin to turn as Mordecai is recognized for his service to the king and Haman we begin to see the precarious situation Haman is in. But Haman still has the upper hand as we anticipate Esther's second dinner with him and the king.

COMMENTARY

6:1 **bring the book of records.** Unable to sleep, the king had his personal history read to him. There he was reminded—or perhaps learned for the first time—that Mordecai had saved his life (see 2:19-23) but realized he had done nothing to thank Mordecai.

6:6 **What shall be done unto the man.** Heightening the tension between our two antagonists, Haman was asked how he would honor someone who had pleased the king. Thinking the king was speaking of him, Haman told the king to clothe and parade the man through town. The king liked the idea and told Haman himself to do this with Mordecai, which Haman did with great sadness.

6:13 **thou shalt not prevail.** Now the roles were reversed. Mordecai was exalted, and Haman was in mourning. His wife and friends don't help, telling him that it looks like his plot against the Jews is backfiring. Right at that moment of maximum tension, the messenger arrived reminding Haman that it was time for dinner with the king and Esther.

Mordecai's loyalty to the king went unrewarded at first but later was recognized. Have you ever had a similar experience?

HAMAN'S PLOT REVEALED (7)

INTRODUCTION

The moment had come for Esther to reveal Haman's plot and her heritage. How would the king react? Who would he support or Haman? She had risked her life once to get this audience with the king; now she risked it again telling him what her request was.

COMMENTARY

7:4 **I am my people.** Esther humbly requested that the king spare her and her people. Confused, the

king asked who was trying to harm her and her people, and she revealed that it was Haman.

7:7 **in his wrath went into the palace garden.** Upset by this news, the king went for a walk in the garden, so Haman began to plead for his life. But when the king returned, he found Haman on Esther's bed (presumably with her but the couch where they were eating, not a sleeping bed), and accused Haman of trying to have his way with her. For this, Haman was killed on the very gallows (stake) he had built for Mordecai.

MORDECAI PROMOTED; PLOT IS FOILED (8)

INTRODUCTION

Mordecai took Haman's position of authority but couldn't reverse Haman's decree previously made in the king's name. But in a stroke of brilliance and inspiration, he devised a solution that solved the problem.

COMMENTARY

8:1 ***On that day.*** Without hesitation, Xerxes granted Esther control over Haman's property, which left his family with nothing. Esther also explained how Mordecai was related to her and the king promoted Mordecai to Haman's former position.

8:5 ***reverse the letters.*** Though Haman was gone, his decree to kill all the Jews still stood, so Esther plead with the king to remove the decree. Notice that once again, Esther risked her life to go before the king uninvited (8:3), and again, the king extended the sceptre to welcome her, though this instance is usually overlooked in the retelling of the story.

8:8 ***may no man reverse.*** The king reminded Esther that a king's decree, sealed with his ring, could not be reversed. Thus the law against the Jews could not be revoked.

8:10 ***wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name.*** Armed with the king's ring and authority, Mordecai therefore issued a new edict (in the third month,

called Silvan, about nine months before the planned attack) saying that on the day of Haman's decree, the Jews should gather themselves together and defend themselves against all attackers. Furthermore, they were allowed to take the property of anyone who attacked them.

8:15 ***in royal apparel.*** Mordecai's wise solution made him a great leader among the people.

8:17 ***many of the people of the land became Jews.*** Because of Esther's and Mordecai's examples and the joy and light of the Jewish people, many joined the Jews in worship (as one translation puts it, "joined themselves to their worship and ceremonies"). It doesn't mean they were fully converted. In the New Testament, these people are referred to as God-fearers (e.g., Acts 10:1).

Do you have examples in your life when the Spirit directed you to do something perhaps unexpected but which was truly beneficial?

JEW'S DEFEAT THEIR ENEMIES; PURIM (9)

COMMENTARY

9:1 ***the Jews smote all their enemies.*** On the appointed day, the Jews, supported by the king's rulers and officers, defeated their enemies, even killing all of Haman's sons and many in the king's own palace. Note that even though they were permitted to do so by the decree, the Jews did not take plunder from their victory over their enemies, showing their greater righteousness.

9:13 ***let Haman's ten sons be hanged.*** Haman's sons were hanged (or skewered, after they were dead, it appears, to further curse them—see Deuteronomy 21:23), and the other enemies were killed, causing a celebration throughout the land.

9:19 ***a day of gladness and feasting.*** The justification for the Feast of Purim is given in verses 19-32. Haman cast the lots (*purim*) to choose the day of the destruction of the Jews, but it turned on him and was his own destruction instead.

MORDECAI SECOND TO THE KING (10)

COMMENTARY

10:2 *the greatness of Mordecai*. The greatness and power of Mordecai are confirmed in this short postscript.

What lessons do you draw from Esther's and Mordecai's examples?

OUTLINE: JOB

- I. Prologue (1:1 – 2:10)
- II. First Dialogue with Friends (2:11 – 11:20)
 - a. Job's friends come to mourn (2:11-13)
 - b. Job's curse (3)
 - c. Eliphaz (4-5)
 - d. Job (6-7)
 - e. Bildad (8)
 - f. Job (9-10)
 - g. Zophar (11)
- III. Second Dialogue with Friends (12-21)
 - a. Job (12-14)
 - b. Eliphaz (15)
 - c. Job (16-17)
 - d. Bildad (18)
 - e. Job (19)
 - f. Zophar (20)
 - g. Job (21)
- IV. Third Dialogue with Friends (22-26)
 - a. Eliphaz (22)
 - b. Job (23-24)
 - c. Bildad (25)
 - d. Job (26)
- V. Fourth Dialogue with Elihu (27-37)
 - a. Job's Speeches (27-31)
 - b. Elihu's Speech (32-37)
- VI. Fifth Dialogue with God (38:1 – 42:6)
- VII. Epilogue (42:7-17)

INTRODUCTION – JOB

The book of Job tells the story of a man in the patriarchal period who suffers great calamities. His name in Hebrew is *'ăyôb*, perhaps meaning 'Where is father?' or 'one who repents,' or related to the word *'ăv* meaning 'enemy,' all of which play into the story. It is a poetic work (though the opening and closing scenes are prose) that is part of the "Wisdom" literature of the Old Testament. Job is a five-act play with a prologue and epilogue and a series of conversations between Job and his so-called friends and finally between God and Job.

Though the story of Job may be somewhat fictionalized (the details of the conversations, etc.), modern revelation indicates that Job was a real person, because the Lord compares Joseph Smith's

suffering in Liberty Jail to Job's (D&C 121:10), and the logic is that the Lord would not make such a comparison with a fictional character, or else it wouldn't have significant meaning to the suffering Prophet.

The structure of Job is like a seven-act play, with a prose prologue and epilogue surrounding a large poetic section composed of five dialogues between Job and his friends and God. Each of these dialogues shows different aspects of the argument that Job deserves the suffering that has been inflicted upon him, with Job contending that he is innocent of sins that would merit such punishments. Job struggles with his position, asking for his punishment to be lifted but continuing to suffer just the same, all the while being falsely accused (as we know because of

the prologue) by well-meaning but misinformed friends. Job can be representative of many times in Israel's history but is probably especially relevant to

post-Exilic Judah as the people grappled with the idea that they had been punished by God even though, in some cases, they were innocent of sin.

PROLOGUE (1:1 – 2:10)

1:1 **in the land of Uz.** "Uz" was a poetic name for the land of Edom.

1:1 **perfect and upright.** The first few verses detail Job's character. "Perfect" means 'whole' or 'complete'; seven sons is also complete, and three daughters represents divine favor. His abundant blessings is an indication of God's favor, reflecting on his character as well. Job even offered burnt offerings (1:5) for his children just in case they sinned, showing his careful obedience even in behalf of others. In short, we are presented with a man who is unquestionably righteous.

1:6 **Sons of God.** The divine assembly; JST says "children," showing it wasn't just a priesthood meeting.

1:7 **The Lord said unto Satan.** Satan is *ha-satan*, meaning 'the accuser' or 'the opponent.' In the literature of the day, this was not Lucifer but one in the council playing an adversarial role—a prosecuting attorney, as it were. He proposes a test to see if Job is only a 'fair weather' believer.

1:15 **the Sabean fell upon them.** This group is from northern Arabia, raiders from the desert, who swoop in and take the animals away, killing the servants keeping them.

1:16 **The fire of God.** The evils that fall on Job are not just from other people but from God himself through fire from heaven.

1:17 **The Chaldeans made out three bands.** These are the pre-Babylonian tribes and raiders coming from the east and take more animals.

1:19 **a great wind.** The alternating source of the evil now returns to something under divine control, killing all of Job's children.

1:20 **rent his mantle, and shaved his head.** Job's reaction was deep mourning and sadness, but he maintained his trust in God, as captured in the famous phrase in 1:21.

2:1 **Again there was a day.** Part two of the council sees the Lord and the accuser coming together to discuss the results of the test.

2:3 **destroy him without cause.** This is a theme that plays out through the story and becomes the central question—why do these evil things happen to a righteous man? We know the answer already due to the prologue but Job and his friends do not and we will watch their struggle.

2:9 **curse God, and die.** Job was cursed with a terrible sickness, an even his wife turned against him, but he still maintained his righteousness and trusted in God, expressed another famous phrase in 2:10.

FIRST DIALOGUE WITH FRIENDS (2:11 – 11:20)

INTRODUCTION

In the first of three dialogues with his three friends, Job was told that he must be a sinner or these terrible things wouldn't have happened to him. He was counseled to repent. Job struggled with these declarations. He felt he was a good man, justified

before God and not deserving of such punishments. Yet he also knew that he was not without sin of some kind and had to agree that the philosophy of his friends matched his own in general. So how could he account for his unusual experience?

JOB'S FRIENDS COME TO MOURN (2:11-13)

2:11 **Job's three friends.** Three men came to mourn with Job as if he were dead. Their names were Eliphaz = 'God is gold'; Bildad = 'confusing love'; and Zophar = 'sparrow.' They did what men do best—sit and say nothing for a week. Ostensibly they came to comfort, but their words showed that they instead condemned Job, concluding that his suffering had come because of sin. This sets up the five 'acts' of the book, with these friends occupying the first three as they banter back and forth with Job about his situation and the nature of God's hand in men's lives.

JOB'S CURSE (3)

3:1 **cursed his day.** Breaking the one week silence, Job started the conversation by cursing the day he was born, wishing it had never happened. He longs for death as a place of peace and freedom from suffering. This declaration lasts to the end of chapter 3. Because of this pattern of those comforting a mourner not speaking until the mourner first says something, Jews today have the guideline to let the person mourning speak first when they arrive to provide support.

Chapter 3 begins the poetic section of the work, which continues through to 42:6.

ELIPHAZ (4-5)

4:1 **Eliphaz the Temanite.** The first friend to speak came from Teman, a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:11).

4:5 **it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.** Eliphaz agreed that Job had been a good man, supporting the weak and holding up the fallen. Then he said, in essence, 'you counseled others during these hard times but you can't endure it yourself.'

4:7 **who ever perished, being innocent?** He got to the core of his argument quickly—does God ever punish the righteous? He argued no, the wicked are punished while the righteous are blessed (compare 1 Nephi 1:9-10). Therefore, Job must be among the wicked to deserve such a punishment.

4:16 **I heard a voice.** Eliphaz claimed inspiration in his words, which he said came from the Spirit. It should be translated, "... before my eyes; a murmur and a voice I heard.' The inspiration he claimed taught that man cannot be greater than God.

5:7 **man is born unto trouble.** Challenges come to everyone. Eliphaz's counsel was that when trouble came, "seek unto God" (5:8).

5:17 **happy is the man whom God correcteth.** He counseled Job to accept God's punishment as a corrective action, a "chastening of the Almighty." He then assured Job that even when God wounds, he also heals.

5:27 **we have searched it, so it is.** 'Take my word for it, Job—this is the way things work.'

JOB (6-7)

6:2 **that my grief were thoroughly weighed.** Job countered that these men do not understand his suffering, and claimed that it is "heavier than the sand of the sea" (6:3).

6:8 **that I might have my request.** Job asked God to bless him with the desire of his heart. In his case, that desire was expressed in chapter 3 and is continued here: "would please God to destroy me" (6:9).

6:19 **troops of Tema . . . companies of Sheba.** Echoing back to those that destroyed or stole Job's flocks (1:15).

6:24 **Teach me, and I will hold my tongue.** Job challenged his friends to tell him something he didn't already know, and he would be quiet, but otherwise he will continue to rebut their points.

6:27 **ye dig a pit for your friend.** This famous phrase was used here in Job as an accusation against his friends' words. The purpose of the pit is to trap the other person in order to sell him (compare Genesis 37), so many translations make this phrase to sell or barter the friend.

7:20 **I have sinned.** Other translations interpret the interrogative here, missed in the KJV, such as in the NIV: "If I have sinned," or NASB: "Have I sinned?" Job

was not declaring a need for repentance but was making a request to show him where he had not been obedient.

7:21 ***pardon my transgression***. If indeed he had sinned in some way or angered God, he pled for forgiveness and mercy, for he had humbled himself as the dust (literally, by putting it on his head, as was the custom of the day during mourning).

BILDAD (8)

8:1 ***Bildad the Shuhite***. The location of Shuah is not known but is likely from the same area as the others—somewhere in Edom. Bildad’s argument was that Job should not have expressed his sorrowful feelings but should repent and seek God’s mercy.

8:6 ***If thou wert pure and upright***. Bildad challenged Job’s righteousness directly; if he was a good man, God would make his way prosperous.

8:11 ***Can the rush grow***. NIV: “Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh? Can reeds thrive without water?”

8:20 ***God will not cast away a perfect man***. Bildad spoke what everyone in his day believed: God would not punish a righteous individual.

JOB (9-10)

9:2 ***I know it is so of a truth***. Job agreed with the philosophy of his friends—God does bless the righteous and punish the wicked. Then he asked an important question: “how should man be just [or justified] with God?” In response, he recounts God’s great power and sovereignty over the earth and man.

9:12 ***What doest thou?*** Man is in no position to question God’s actions or decisions.

9:15 ***I would make supplication***. Job showed his humility by declaring that even if he were a righteous man, he would simply plead before his judge, the Lord.

9:20 ***mine own mouth shall condemn me***. Job recognized his conundrum—he agreed with the philosophy presented by his friends, yet he also knew he was not deserving of such punishment. But if he declared his innocence, his own situation cried out that he must not be telling the truth.

9:32 ***For he is not a man, as I am***. Job recognized that he could not approach God like another man, demanding a response or even calling for an arbiter (“daysman,” 9:33) to mediate their disagreement. He wished he could just speak to the Lord about this, “but it is not so with me” (9:35).

10:4 ***Hast thou eyes of flesh?*** Job knew that God is not mortal, so asked rhetorical questions about that. His point in doing so is in verse 7: “Thou knowest that I am not wicked.”

10:15 ***I am full of confusion***. Job acknowledged that God made him (“Thou hast granted me life,” 10:12) and knows him, so that if he is wicked, he will be punished, but if he is righteous, the Lord will “lift up [his] head” (10:15, raise him up). Since he was suffering, the result was confusion; his understanding of God’s justice didn’t match his current situation.

Elder Richard G. Scott said: “When you face adversity, you can be led to ask many questions. Some serve a useful purpose; others do not. To ask, Why does this have to happen to me? Why do I have to suffer this now? What have I done to cause this? will lead you into blind alleys. It really does no good to ask questions that reflect opposition to the will of God. Rather ask, What am I to do? What am I to learn from this experience? What am I to change? Whom am I to help? How can I remember my many blessings in times of trial?” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 17).

ZOPHAR (11)

11:1 ***Zophar the Naamathite***. The third friend finally spoke, and the first thing he told Job was that he talks too much (“should a man full of talk be justified?” 11:2) and was a liar (11:3).

11:6 ***God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth***. Mincing no words, Zophar let Job know that he thought God was being lenient, that the

punishment of losing all possessions, family, and health was not enough for Job's great sins (whatever they were).

11:13 ***If thou prepare thine heart.*** Zophar counseled Job to repent and ask God for forgiveness. If he did this, he would be blessed to forget his misery and shine like the morning. He would have rest and safety without fear.

How could Job's friends have been of greater support and comfort to him? Have you experienced something like Job's friends or something like what they might have done to better help him?

SECOND DIALOGUE WITH FRIENDS (12-21)

INTRODUCTION

In the second dialogue, the arguments became stronger and more personal. Job and his friends each accused the other of gross wickedness and tired of hearing each other's arguments. In the end of this section, Job raised an important point that counters the belief that the righteous are blessed and the wicked punished—just look around, he says, and see that the wicked seem to have it pretty good, with nice homes, families, jobs, and other material blessings. If that is not true, it follows that a person who is suffering may not be evil after all but a 'victim' of the same paradox—or delay—of judgment.

JOB (12-14)

12:3 ***I have understanding as well as you.*** Job seemed to have some sarcasm when he told them they were representative of "the people" (12:2), but assured them that he knew as much. In fact, "who knoweth not such things as these?"

12:9 ***the hand of the Lord hath wrought this.*** Job agreed that God was responsible for his suffering, then recited the merits and powers of God in verses 10-24.

13:3 ***I desire to reason with God.*** Just as the accuser ("Satan") acted in a court-like manner, putting forth

accusations about Job, Job desires his day in court, to reason directly with God about his situation.

13:4 ***ye are forgers of lies.*** Job's frustration with his friends came out strongly in these verses, where he called them liars, "physicians of no value," and told them to "hold your peace!" (13:5).

13:15 ***yet will I trust in him.*** JSB: "He may well slay me; I may have no hope; Yet I will argue my case before him." The terms used indicate a legal procedure—Job desired to have his day in court, even if it would cost him his life.

13:23 ***make me to know my transgression and my sin.*** Job demands of God to know what sin he has committed that is responsible for the harsh judgment that has befallen him.

14:12 ***So man lieth down, and riseth not.*** Phrases like this lead many to believe that the ancient Jews had no concept of a resurrection. Job is somewhat contradictory; he certainly says this and others ("If a man die, shall he live again?" in 14:14) but in the same breath looks forward to a "change" that comes after "my appointed time," and also claims that in his flesh, he would yet see God (19:26). The conclusion is that both arguments relate to his miserable yet demanding state of mind and he was not trying to make a theological or doctrinal argument in any of these statements.

ELIPHAZ (15)

15:6 **Thine own mouth condemneth thee.** Eliphaz, speaking the second time, was shocked at Job's words, sarcastically calling him "a wise" who speaks nonsense (15:2); from Job's mouth came iniquity (15:5); his own lips testified against him (15:6).

15:25 **strengtheneth himself against the Almighty.** Job was like a man fighting against God and standing on his neck (15:26). But God will "cast off his flower as the olive" (15:33).

JOB (16-17)

16:2 **miserable comforters are ye all.** Job was not happy about the 'help' his friends were giving him. He boldly stated that if the tables were turned, he "would strengthen you with my mouth" (16:5).

16:11 **God hath delivered me to the ungodly.** Job's condemnation of his friends was strong, calling them "ungodly," "wicked," and "mockers" (17:2). He declared, "I cannot find one wise man among you" (17:10).

16:18 **O earth, cover not thou my blood.** Spilled blood was a witness of the innocence of the victim. Job was invoking this image, saying that his innocence would cry out upon his demise.

16:19 **my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.** Calling again upon the judgment metaphor, Job claimed that his righteousness was also well documented in heavenly records.

17:15 **where is now my hope?** Job had lost hope of having a normal life again; he believed that suffering would be his lot until he died.

BILDAD (18)

18:17 **His remembrance shall perish from the earth.** Bildad's second speech continued castigating Job, saying that he talked too much (18:2) and that he was treating his friends poorly (18:3). He then listed a host of things that will happen to a wicked man like Job, including that no one would remember him.

JOB (19)

19:2 **How long will ye vex my soul.** Job lashed right back, wondering how long they can carry on this unfair onslaught of words.

19:7 **I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard.** Though Job was upset with his friends' judgments, he recognizes that it is God that has inflicted him (19:6) and no longer answered his prayers.

19:19 **my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me.** Job was speaking of the friends sitting before him first, and of his wife second.

19:20 **I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.** Meaning 'by a narrow margin.'

19:25 **I know that my redeemer liveth.** Perhaps the most famous verses in Job are 19:25-26. A redeemer is another legal term, the person (usually family member) who comes to liberate a slave or free a person from debt. Since Job is contending against God, disputing the judgment he has apparently received, the redeemer he looks forward to is one that will stand *against* God to declare Job's innocence and free him from this punishment. This fits marvelously with the concept that Jesus is our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1; D&C 29:5; 32:3; 45:3; 110:4), who stands in our behalf as our Redeemer and proclaims our innocence because of his atoning sacrifice.

19:26 **after my skin worms destroy this body.** This awkward phrase in the KJV is better translated, "Even after my skin is destroyed" (NASB).

ZOPHAR (20)

20:5 **the triumphing of the wicked is short.** Zophar's second speech picked up where his friends left off, continuing to chastise Job for his wickedness. Even as Job was looking forward to a future redemption when he would be proved right, Zophar claimed that his minor triumph would be short-lived. He compared Job to "dung" that would perish (20:7) or a "dream" that flies away (20:8).

20:27 **heaven shall reveal his iniquity.** After listing a number of terrible things that would happen to a wicked man like Job, Zophar concluded that heaven itself would reveal his great sins, countering Job's statement that heaven was the witness of his righteousness (16:19).

JOB (21)

21:3 **after that I have spoken, mock on.** Job was tired of the banter with his friends (though he was not done yet) and invites them after his next argument to mock him, if they could.

21:7 **Wherefore do the wicked live.** A new theme arose as Job moved away from his 'woe is me' and 'just tell me what my sin is' statements to his

observation that the wicked don't really seem to suffer God's judgments as much as their view of the world might lead them to believe they should. He notes that their houses are safe, they animals live, "and their children dance" (21:11).

21:15 **What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?** The wicked, whose lives are peaceful and prosperous, see no need for God in their lives.

21:30 **the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction.** 'the wicked are spared on the day of destruction.'

21:31 **Who shall declare his way to his face?** A wicked person who has money and power will not tolerate someone else telling them what they have done wrong.

THIRD DIALOGUE WITH FRIENDS (22-26)

INTRODUCTION

The third dialogue is shorter, with Bildad barely commenting and Zophar not speaking at all. Some believe this indicates that the friends have tired of the argument or feel like Job is strongly making his point. Others look carefully at the structure and see a possibility of Zophar's words being in chapter 26, with chapter 25 a continuation of Job's words in chapter 24. But the words of Bildad in 25 seem to be a surrender to Job's logic and 26 is a good praise of God's power, leading to the next section with Job's long monologue and Elihu's final statements.

ELIPHAZ (22)

22:3 **Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous?** Eliphaz took a slightly different tack—he is going to tell Job what he has done wrong (in answer to Job's questions in 10:2 and 13:23), but first spoke here of God's indifference to man. How could puny man's actions really matter to the God of the universe?

22:5 **Is not thy wickedness great?** Eliphaz began to list things that he charges Job with—sinful behaviors against neighbors, men, and even widows.

22:23 **return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up.** Eliphaz continued to call Job to repentance, challenging him to know God, receive his law, and live his commandments. Then Job would receive the blessings from heaven that he was lacking.

JOB (23-24)

23:3 **Oh that I knew where I might find him!** Responding to Eliphaz, Job cries that if he could just find God, he would happily listen to him because he would "be delivered for ever from my judge" (23:7). But Job's frustration was that God "hideth himself" (23:9) so Job cannot find him.

23:10 **I shall come forth as gold.** Job's confidence in his own righteousness remained. Shifting to a somewhat more optimistic perspective, he declared that when God was done testing him, he would be pure and precious like gold. He has kept God's ways, walked in his paths, and esteemed his words. Yet even though he knows this is true, "the Almighty troubleth me" (23:16).

24:1 **they that know him not see his days?** Job returned to his previous thought about the wicked disobeying God yet not experiencing immediate punishment. They change boundary lines, steal animals from orphans and widows, and persecute

the needy. They harvest crops while the naked remain that way. They steal children from the poor as payment and take food from the hands of the workers. They murder and commit adultery, and suffer no consequence.

24:25 ***if it be not so now, who will make me a liar.*** Job invites the friends to challenge his observation, if they can—do the wicked prosper, as Job says, or suffer, as the friends have been saying?

BILDAD (25)

25:4 ***How then can man be justified with God?*** Bildad's final argument avoided Job's challenge and was a short shrug of the shoulders—God is powerful, complicated, and impossible to please, especially by man, which Bildad compared to a worm.

JOB (26)

26:2 ***How hast thou helped him that is without power?*** Job sadly asked his friends how they have helped him by their words?

26:6 ***Hell is naked before him.*** The conversation turned to God's attributes, which is the topic for verses 5-14.

What can we learn from Job's responses to his friends?

FOURTH DIALOGUE WITH ELIHU (27-37)

INTRODUCTION

In the final dialogue with other mortals, Job first gave two speeches (chapters 27-28 and 29-31) that the text each calls a "parable" (27:1 and 29:1), which could mean proverb, saying, or poem. Then a new friend appeared, having been sitting and listening the whole time apparently, but not introduced until this moment when he chose to speak. He gave four speeches, more than each of the other three friends had done, only without any comment by Job.

JOB'S SPEECHES (27-31)

27:4 ***My lips shall not speak wickedness.*** In spite of his wife and friends chiding him and his dire situation, Job swears ("As God liveth" in 27:2) that he will not speak evil, wickedness, or lies.

27:13 ***This is the portion of a wicked man with God.*** Job outlined how ultimately the wicked are indeed punished and lose everything when they die—they can't take it with them.

28:18 ***the price of wisdom is above rubies.***

Following themes from other Wisdom literature, Job talked about many things that a person can experience, but ultimately would not bring him the most important thing to be gained in life—wisdom, which cannot be bought.

28:28 ***Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.***

The only way to gain true wisdom is to fear God and depart from evil.

29:2 ***that I were as in months past.*** Job waxed nostalgic for his previous safety and prosperity, when he enjoyed his family, when people respected him and when he did good to others. He talked about all the good he did—helping widows, the blind, the lame, and the poor, and punishing the wicked.

30:1 ***But now.*** In contrast to his life before the calamities, Job was now treated poorly. Young men held him in derision, he was abhorred by his peers, he was persecuted by many.

30:21 ***Thou art become cruel to me.*** Job's ultimate accusation to God was that God opposed Job and was

mean to him. He wouldn't even let Job die to relieve his suffering.

31:6 **Let me be weighed in an even balance.** Job cried out for equity—if he had sinned, let him be punished, but if he had no sin, he wanted God to recognize his integrity. Job listed a number of potential crimes that might merit various punishments and challenges God to say if he had done any of them.

31:40 **The words of Job are ended.** Job had presented his case before the bar of God, but before God answered, Elihu stepped in with his own youthful observations.

ELIHU'S SPEECHES (32-37)

32:5 **then his wrath was kindled.** Waiting for the older men to speak and expecting them to deal with Job's assertions of righteousness when he clearly was being punished for sins, Elihu (a variant of Elijah, meaning 'my God is YHWH') stepped forward at the end, no longer able to constrain himself.

33:4 **the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.** Elihu claimed inspiration for his words (see also 32:8), that the spirit (or breath) of God had given him understanding beyond the wisdom of others. This is an arrogant attitude for a young man.

33:6 **I am according to thy wish in God's stead.** Job asked for an audience with God; Elihu claimed to give him that opportunity as he stood in for God.

33:8 **I have heard the voice of thy words.** Elihu summarized Job's arguments, that he was "without transgression" (33:9) and that count punished him unjustly. But Job was the one who was unjust, because "God is greater than man" (33:12) and does not have to account for his actions to man.

33:24 **Then he is gracious unto him.** Elihu's argument was that God punishes the sinner just to the brink of "the pit," then is gracious to him so he will repent.

34:7 **walketh with wicked men.** In his second speech, Elihu condemned Job as a man that takes

company with sinners and spends time with wicked men. He reasons that "God will not do wickedly" (34:12) which is what he says Job has accused. God sees all and no wickedness is hidden from him, and he punishes the wicked.

34:36 **My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end.** Going back to his premise that God punishes the wicked right up to their limit, Elihu claimed concern for Job in that he wished him to reach that point so that he could turn back to God and God might bless him.

35:5 **Look unto the heavens.** In his third speech, Elihu directed Job to look up and recognize that man is nothing—his sins or goodness have no impact on God, though others on earth are certainly impacted.

35:16 **doth Job open his mouth in vain.** Elihu denied Job's words—what he has experienced proved his sin, and "God will not hear vanity" (35:13).

36:4 **he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee.** In his final speech, Elihu shows his great arrogance: he is speaking "on God's behalf" (36:1), getting "knowledge from afar" (36:2), and speaking in perfect knowledge.

36:9 **he sheweth them their work.** Elihu completely disagreed with Job's observations about the wicked—they are indeed punished and the righteous are preserved. Even kings who disobey God are carried away into captivity, proving their transgressions. If they obey, they will prosper, and if they don't obey, they will perish.

36:21 **this hast thou chosen.** Elihu claimed that Job had chosen sin and continued affliction rather than turning back to God.

37:5 **God thundereth marvelously with his voice.** Elihu extolled God's virtues and power; he controls the weather, the sunlight, the animals, and the waters. Man cannot comprehend God's greatness: "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" (37:16).

FIFTH DIALOGUE WITH GOD (38:1 – 42:6)

38:1 **The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.** Finally, after all the speeches of Job and his friends, the Lord spoke, showing his authority to speak by the very nature of his words coming from a whirlwind. The Lord never answered Job’s questions directly, but overwhelmed him by a showing of his might and superiority.

38:3 **I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.** Job had been demanding answers from God all this time but when God appears, he makes his authority clear—he will ask the questions and Job will answer them. However, the questions are such that Job can have no answer but are designed to show God’s vast superiority to man.

38:4 **Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?** The first question is representative of the rest—did Job understand how the earth was created? Other questions include: has Job walked in the depths of the sea (38:16)? Has he been able to open “the gates of death” (38:17)? Has he comprehended “the breadth of the earth” (38:18)? Does he understand the properties of light (38:24) or how rivers or lightning is made (38:25)? Can he attach something to the stars (38:31) or control the weather (38:34)?

39:1 **the wild goats.** Chapter 39 is a series of questions about wild animals, asking Job if he could manage them or understand them or feed them or care for them.

40:2 **Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?** The Lord concluded his first remarks with a call for humility—was Job in any position to teach anything to God?

40:4 **what shall I answer thee?** Job was completely humbled and had no answer for all of God’s questions. All he could do was “lay mine hand upon my mouth.”

40:14 **Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.** If could do the things God had suggested—speak with thunder, array

himself with glory, bring down the proud and wicked—then the Lord would admit that Job could save himself. Otherwise, Job had no choice but to admit that he was reliant on God.

41:1 **Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?** Having demonstrated his power over the earth, the weather, the animals, and more, the Lord concludes by demonstrating that he has power even over mythical creatures such as leviathan the sea creature, and behemoth (40:15), the great land beast.

42:3 **I have uttered that I understood not.** A very humble Job acknowledges that he has spoken without understanding fully.

42:5 **now mine eye seeth thee.** Job had been asking for a hearing before God. Now that he had it, his reaction was to repent (42:6, even though God himself had declared him “perfect” in 1:8), completely overlooking the fact that God never answered any of his earlier demands. Before, Job had worked from second-hand knowledge of God; now he knew him firsthand, seeing him with his own eyes.

How do we reconcile Job’s friends’ and the Book of Mormon’s clear teachings that if we “keep the commandments” we will “prosper” and if we “rebel” we shall not (see 1 Nephi 2:20 and Triple Combination Index under “Prosper”) and the story of Job?

EPILOGUE (42:7-17)

42:7 **the Lord said to Eliphaz.** Though the three friends had all spoken to Job, the Lord reprimanded Eliphaz representatively, chastising him for the things they had said to Job. Eliphaz was told to sacrifice to the Lord and have Job pray for them, “lest I deal with you after your folly” (42:8).

42:10 **when he prayed for his friends.** Job was blessed when he stopped thinking of his own problems and prayed for his errant friends. As a result, his many family members and friends came to comfort him and each gave him money to relieve his suffering, and Job (with God’s blessing) wisely turned that into more wealth than he had before.

42:12 **seven sons and three daughters.** Job ended up with twice as much property as before—except for children. That was because his other children were still his eternally, so in reality he did have twice as many in the end. The daughters in verse 14 are Jemima (‘day by day’), Kezia (the name of an herb, representing beauty), and Keren-happuch (‘horn of antimony,’ used for eye make-up).

42:17 **old and full of days.** Job died a very old man, his time of suffering being only a small fraction of his full and happy life.

Elder Orson F. Whitney: “No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God ... and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven” (quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 98).

Joseph Smith: “I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, ... knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 304).

WORKS CONSULTED

Abegg, Martin, Jr., Flint, Peter, and Ulrich, Eugene, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (Harper Collins, 1999). (DSSB)

Arnold, Bill T., and Williamson, H. G. M., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (Intervarsity Press, 2005).

Brown, Francis, Driver, S. R., and Briggs, Charles A., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson, 2001). (BDB)

Fishbane, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2004) (JSB).

Harris, R. Laird, Archer, Gleason L., and Waltke, Bruce K., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Bible Institute, 1980) (TWOT).

Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel, Pike, Dana M., and Seely, David Rolph, *Jehovah and the World of the Old Testament* (Deseret Book, 2009).

Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Hendrickson, 2001).

MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nelson, 2005).

Old Testament Student Manual, 2 vols. (Student Manual).

Olson, Camille Fronk, *Women of the Old Testament* (Deseret Book 2009).

Rasmussen, Ellis, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* (Deseret Book, 1993).

Walton, John H., ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 5 vols. (Zondervan, 2009)
(Zondervan).

Wayment, Thomas A., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament* (Deseret Book, 2009).