

JOB'S BREAKDOWN AND LAMENT (Job 3) CBC-5 Feb 2012

Job's story (chs. 1-2). Great godliness, wealth, blessedness. Lost every earthly blessing in one day. Childless, penniless, nearly dead. We've never known a greater or faster plummet from happiness.

Two phases of testing Job's piety end in his vindication (1.22; 2.10).

Third phase of testing is "theological needling" by his friends (chs. 4-31). Job proved true to God in this phase too but not without sin. Still, God graciously justified him again (42.7). We should learn from this to forbear others, especially when they are grieving.

"Breakdown" → is a non-technical term understood to involve "a sudden collapse in mental health" (COED) and may include these symptoms: inability to function normally in everyday life, irregular heartbeat, painful muscles, dizziness, trembling, bowel problems, and exhaustion. Doubtless Job had at least some of these. I don't mean to imply he went insane or lost his mind, but he was quite overwhelmed.

"Lament" → an expression of sorrow, especially a formal one in verse or song. Indeed, Job 3 bears the marks of Hebrew poetry.

Job's lamentation belongs with other biblical psalms of grief, . . . and all are gathered up into that horrifying dereliction of Jesus as the true cries of lost humanity, trying to find its lost God. . . . Though in the form of a lurid curse, elaborate and exaggerated, it is intended to bewail a man's misery and so to evoke human and divine pity. The poetry catches the wild cries. The ejaculations are taut and the grammar is difficult, almost to the point of incoherence. Translators spoil the art by making it smooth (Andersen, in loc., TOTC).

My prayerful, prolonged meditation brought me to tears repeatedly. Understood and absorbed, Job 3 is very sad, but it can impart wisdom.

Job Spoke (vv. 1-2)

Four old men [and Elihu at least] sat for a week of silence and then heard Job's heart-wrenching outburst. His grief made him speechless first and then he poured forth a torrent of words, but still found no rest.

He "cursed his day," day of his birth (v. 3; cf. 1.4, birthdays celebrated together). Mothers forget the pains of childbirth for joy on that day (John 16.21), but Job's hindsight is 20/20. He was greatly blessed, but now he feels so miserable that living was not worth it to him.

A "curse" is a prayer for destruction, here a particularly OT way of saying, "I wish I had never been born." The alternative Job envisions was to be dead already, delivered forever from the vicissitudes of this life.

I WISH I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN! (3.3-12)

Jesus said of his betrayer, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born" (Matt 26.24 ESV); his suffering in hell would far outweigh any blessing in this life. Truly this may be said to a lesser degree of all who die in their sins. Strictly speaking, though, it was not true of Job, but he felt as if it were true. He voices his very real anguish, and instead of being faulted for that, he should be pitied.

Let the Day of My Birth Be Cursed (vv. 3-5)

V. 3 introduces vv. 4-9, curses the entire 24-hour span, day and night. The thought, attractive to Job, is that if the whole day "perished," his birth had not occurred. "A boy is conceived" refers not to the day of conception, but the day of birth when the gender is known, and is comparable to, "It's a boy!" Now Job mourns the day of his birth.

V. 4, ordinarily the daytime is illumined by the sun; here the idea is that if you cannot see it, it is like it isn't there, or else that the day would not be favored by God, blessed with the live birth of Job.

V. 5, an intensification of signs of God's disfavor upon the day. "Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it" (ESV). Job now hates that day!

Let the Night of My Birth Be Cursed (vv. 6-9)

V. 6 ff., comparable curses for the night. Let this night no longer be counted or recognized. Like skyscrapers with no "unlucky" 13th floor.

V. 7. "Solitary," as if one night could be separated from all the others, and removed from the course of time passing. Job feels the happy voices heard that night were unjustified.

V. 8. A call for others to join Job in this cursing. The Heb. for "mourning" is Leviathan, "the proper name of a large aquatic animal, perhaps reflecting a mythological monster" (ISBE). Possibly, "May those who cast spells upon the day damn it, / Those prepared to disable Leviathan" (Tanakh). This does not approve of sorcery, but it may acknowledge it and wish for its malevolent power to be applied in this particular case.

V. 9, Job wishes gone even the little light a night has, twinkling stars and the earliest light of dawn, lit., "the eyelids of the morning" (ESV).

Note the metaphorical use of light/darkness to represent life/death, "since the realm of death is a dark place" (Andersen on 3.20). Job wishes for the utter extermination of the day of his birth.

Why Did I Have to Be Born Alive? (vv. 10-12)

V. 10. The reason for his curse. Birth like leaving home through doors. His day did not keep him unborn or hide his present trouble from him.

V. 11. "If I had to be born, why could I not have died immediately?" The grief of his parents would have been small compared to his own grief. This is

especially poignant considering Job's former blessedness; now the bad far outweighs the good. Even the godly feel that way sometimes.

This begins a series of seven "why" questions: vv. 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 16a ("why was I not as a hidden stillborn child?"), 20 ("why is light given to him who is in misery?", ESV), 23. Our strong impulse when suffering, to ask "Why?" Job received no answer. Readers know why (to test Job), but his ignorance of the divine intention is a huge part of the test.

V. 12. "Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?" (NIV). The mother's tenderest love and care is despised as it was the means of Job's continued survival in this pain-filled world.

I WISH I WERE DEAD! (3.13-19)

Job never took his own life because even at his lowest he feared God. Suicide is never righteous or justifiable like expressing grief extravagantly in response to extraordinary suffering. This test was not whether Job was a man (sensible), but whether he was devoted to God. God made us all passionate beings, sensible to pain, capable of great sorrow. Even then we can glorify God, as Job's lament and many Psalms illustrate.

Scripture never exalts Stoicism, "holding that the wise man should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief" (MWCD), "enduring pain and hardship without showing one's feelings or complaining" (COED). There is a righteous way to vent, a self-pity before God that is encouraged.

I Would Be Resting (vv. 13-16)

V. 13, "for now," in the event I had been stillborn. Lying down, peace and quiet, sleeping, resting—all welcome alternatives to acute, chronic pain.

V. 14, like kings, counselors [rulers], "rebuilt ruins for themselves" (ESV), irksome work for ephemeral glory, from which death relieves them.

V. 15, like princes or nobles, accumulated riches, now worthless to them. Cf. 1 Cor 7.29-31, impending death mocks living for this world only.

V. 16, Job counts the stillborn more blessed for escaping life's troubles.

I Am Jealous of the Dead (vv. 17-19)

V. 17, "there," the one place where all dead people go, "the wicked cease from" either causing or being troubled (ambiguous Heb.), and "the weary are at rest," a cessation of all earthly toil and tiredness.

Job's description of the intermediate state is vague and based largely on observing peaceful corpses, due to progressive revelation and the early date of writing. It would be a mistake to infer from this every person's peace in the afterlife (Isa 57.20-21; Luke 16.24).

Vv. 18-19, contrasting prisoners/oppressor, small/great, servant/master emphasizes the great leveling that comes through death no matter what

class or advantages we enjoyed in this life. These verses also stress the relief from temporary earthly suffering to be found in death, with prisoners and slaves freed from their earthly lords.

Job feels locked up in misery, enslaved to trouble, and yearns for the end.

WHY DOES GOD KEEP ME ALIVE? (3.20-26)

Resumption of why questions, philosophical. "I don't see the purpose in it."

I Don't Understand the Reason for My Suffering (vv. 20-23)

V. 20, "light" equated to "life." Why is life prolonged [by God] to the suffering?

Vv. 21-22. Each day mocks their lust for death, who celebrate its approach.

V. 23, original difficult, possibly, "to the man who has lost his way, whom God has hedged about" (Tanakh). "There is an ironical echo of what Satan had said in 1:10. He saw God's *hedge* as a protection; Job finds it a restriction. He feels trapped" (Andersen, in loc.).

I Am Overwhelmed by My Sorrows (vv. 24-26)

V. 24 figuratively represents constant moaning/groaning as bread and water.

V. 25, the most terrifying prospect realized in experience. Imagine yours.

V. 26, modern translations prefer present tense: "For me, there is no calm, no peace; my torments banish rest" (NJB). A summary statement.

WHY DO WE NEED TO HEAR THIS LAMENT?

First, we do need to hear it (2 Tim 3.16). While some parts are more profitable, none unworthy of our careful attention, but this chapter has promise of special benefit (Eccl 7.2-4).

1. To Learn of God's Compassion (Jas 5.11). God heard, preserved, publishes this lament. His compassion is aroused by such (Lam 3.22-23). He would arouse ours to sympathy for the suffering to be like him. The hard-hearted and unsympathetic are more like Satan than God.
2. To Lament Sin's Curse and Loathe Sin Itself. This world is Paradise Lost. God righteously cursed the creation when man rebelled. If sin is ultimately to blame for all the misery in this world, then how terrible sin is!
3. To Love the Savior Who Suffered. To deliver us from our misery Christ plunged himself into it. We all taste Job's cup, but Christ drank it down to its bitterest dregs, emptying it for all who will believe in him. How then should we love him!
4. To Live Through Our Distresses. He who preserved Job can help you! Your horrible suffering disproves neither God's love nor faithfulness.
5. To Look Forward to Full Redemption (Rom 7.24-25; 8.18-25).