Commentary on Job 42

Adapted from "Job," Basic Bible Commentary, by Gregory M. Weeks


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**Introduction to This Chapter**

The action prior to this chapter highlighted the Lord's passionate attempts to restore a relationship with Job. The two preceding chapters contain the second whirlwind speech, which detailed God's creative power and benevolent care.

The question opening this chapter is thus, What will Job do? His previous response was in short, clipped, angry sentences (40:3-5). Will this one be any different? Will the Lord's second speech produce better results?

The opening verses of chapter 42 answer this. Job admits to rashness. He confesses that he spoke without really knowing all the facts. He praises God. And he concludes his speech promising humility: . . . Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes (verse 6).

This response must be placed in perspective. The friends had relentlessly dogged Job, trying to beat him into submission. Their only reward was frustration. Now God speaks. In only a fraction of the length of the friends’ speeches, the Lord echoes their basic sentiments (that is, divine power and justice). Then Job repents.

Why does God do what the friends couldn't? Because the Lord speaks to Job's feelings, not his thoughts. Without coercion (who can coerce God?), and with no ulterior motive, the Almighty personally appears and passionately speaks. Job is moved. He admits that this was what drew him to repent: I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you (verse 5 NRSV).

Job sees God reaching out, trying to ease his suffering and restore a love relationship. Behind the Lord's words are the whisperings of a lover. His reply is but a passionate praise to that lover.

The remainder of chapter 42 consists of the prose epilogue. As noted in the Introduction (see “How the Book Was Written”), this is the conclusion of the tale appropriated by the poet.

In this ending, two very important things happen. First, God criticizes Job's friends, commanding them to beseech Job's intercession (verses 7-9). Following this, the Lord restores Job's fortunes (verses 10-17).
These events show that the conclusion of the book is not just a happy one. It is also a surprising, turning-the-tables one. Throughout, the book has portrayed the friends as the righteous ones. They had health and wealth. They talked about God in terms of statements, not questions. Job, on the other hand, was the complete opposite. The loss of his comfort and well-being seemingly pointed to the shambles of his spiritual life. His speech was filled with angry oaths against God. Yet, in the end, this man was justified by the Lord, and the others chastised. Why?

It is a tribute to the genius of the author that he concludes the book by dramatically answering the question that began it. The friends epitomize the smug theology of ancient Israel: God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. Job, conversely, symbolizes the person who is honest with herself or himself, and who seeks new ways of relating to the Lord. Who is right? The book's conclusion gives the author's answer. The one who asks questions, seeking and struggling through a passionate faith, is the one the Lord blesses.

In terms of critical considerations, the biggest question is the reappearance of the prose portion. If it were tied to the ending of the prose introduction (2:13), then—filling in the blanks—the original story may have appeared as follows: Job's friends, agreeing with his wife, urged the sufferer to curse God and die (2:9). Job patiently persevered, however. Consequently, the sufferer was blessed.

It is no accident, though, that the poet adds this to the conclusion of his poem. Following as it does the extensive dialogues, it makes a different and powerful statement. As seen above, and as will be seen in the commentary, this prose ending is the distinctive signature of the poet.

**Job's Response to God's Second Speech (42:1-6)**

Compare this to his first response, in 40:3-5. There Job was sullen. His gaze was inward, focusing on his hurt; I appears six times in that two-verse speech. Job was impervious to God's attempts for reconciliation. As a lover who has been hurt by the beloved, Job nursed his anger and was fearful of letting it go.

He has totally changed in the second speech. God's passionate overtures finally seduce him. His response is filled with humility. More importantly, though, it brims with praises to God. Job is looking past his hurt and seeing a loving Lord. The warm feelings he once had are rekindled. Regardless of what happens to him, he will love the Lord.

Job begins his response with praise. He acknowledges, finally, what God has said in the two speeches. By such an acknowledgment, Job is saying that God is just after all. This is not, though, an affirmation of the friends' simplistic formula of God punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. Job is simply affirming God's goodness, regardless.

Verse 3 repeats 38:2 (see the commentary on that verse.) Repeating God's words is an affirmation of God, as evidenced in the remainder of the verse. It is perhaps possible,
also, to see in such repetition Job’s subconscious reflection upon God's indictment of him.

What Job did not understand was the nature of God. Because of his suffering, God appeared callous and even evil. But now, because of the Lord's appearing in the whirlwind, Job sees wonderful things. At the apex is the realization that God is loving and just after all.

The first part of verse 4 is an attention getter, pointing to the importance of what follows (see 33:31). The rest of the verse repeats 38:3. In repeating this, Job affirms God's supremacy. God does not submit to questioning; God asks the questions.

Everything about God was speculation for Job. He only knew God by the hearing of the ear (verse 5). The Lord's appearance in the whirlwind, however, changes this: but now my eye sees you. This personal encounter alters the emotions as well as the intellect.

Job despises himself for having thought God was uncaring and unjust. The ashes in which he repents may be from his earlier acts of purification (see the commentary on 2:8).

God's Rebuke of Job's Friends (42:7-9)
These verses begin the prose epilogue. Only the three original friends are mentioned here; Elihu, the fourth friend who spoke in chapters 32-37, is omitted. It appears as if the companions have already left Job, since they are directed to go to him. Perhaps they departed out of frustration and disgust.

God addresses Eliphaz, since he is the oldest. The Lord's condemnation—you have not spoken of me what is right (verse 7)—is the poet's condemnation of the traditional theology espoused by the friends. The companions had twisted their perception of things in order to defend God. They had said, for example, that the wicked are punished; if they had been true to their senses, though, they would have observed that sometimes sinners prosper. The poet harshly criticizes such blindness. (See also the commentary on 13:7-11.)

The size of the burnt offering mentioned in verse 8 is huge. Numbers 23:1 and Ezekiel 45:21-25 mention offerings of similar size, but they were given on behalf of entire nations. The immensity of the sacrifice indicates the gravity of the friends' sin.

Regarding Job's intercessory power (verse 9), see Ezekiel 14:14, 20. Even such a gigantic offering is not enough. The friends need Job's prayer in order for God to accept it.

God's Restoration of Job's Fortune (42:10-17)
This concluding section is the “happy ending” of the book. God brings fullness to Job in all aspects of his life: in society (verse 11), in possessions (verse 12), and in his family
(verses 13-15). In addition, the Lord allows Job to live a long time, so as to enjoy this prosperity (verses 16-17).

Note that only after Job prays for the friends does God reward Job with twice as much. The friends were not compassionate. They were rebuked by God. But when Job forgives them and prays for them, God restores his fortunes.

The fact that Job's brothers, sisters, and friends had abandoned him underlines the social implications of the doctrine of divine reward and punishment: Stay away from a sufferer, since that person is a sinner experiencing God's wrath. Note, though, that when they return, they comfort Job for all the troubles that the LORD had brought upon him. They have changed. They abandon the belief of divine reward and punishment. They acknowledge that Job's suffering was a mystery, somehow centered in God. Their faith has deepened as a result of Job's struggles.

The piece of money (NRSV; NIV, silver) is a qesitah, a small weight of silver. Other Old Testament references (Genesis 33:19; Joshua 24:32) mention one hundred qesitahs being the price of a field. A gold ring was a valuable piece of jewelry in the ancient world, worn either in the nose (Genesis 24:47) or ear (Genesis 35:4). The money and jewelry are gifts welcoming Job back into the community.

Job's possessions have exactly doubled. Compare his new fortune with his original one, in 1:3.

Job now has the same number and ratio of children that he had in the beginning of the book (see 1:2). Jemimah means dove or turtledove. Keziah may be translated cinnamon. Kerenhappuch means eyeshadow. These names are symbols of female beauty. Cinnamon may refer to the spice in a perfume, while eyeshadow refers to the cosmetic. Job's daughters, with their beauty and wealth, would be secure in the world.

Of special note is that the daughters, not the sons, are named. Also, the women are given an inheritance along with their brothers, an amazing occurrence in the ancient male-dominated society.

Seeing four generations was extraordinary (see Genesis 50:23). This is another sign of God's blessing.

Verse 17: This is a traditional designation of honor for respected leaders in Jewish history (see Genesis 25:8). Considering what Job had gone through, he certainly deserved it!

**The Message of Job 42**

The Lord never gives up. The fact that Job moves from cursing to praising shows this. God relentlessly pursues Job. The Lord visits him in a whirlwind. God puts together an elaborate speech. When that fails, the Lord constructs another. Finally, the ice in Job's heart melts. Overwhelmed by the Almighty's persistence, he returns the Lord's love.
Suffering produces an emptiness of the heart. The person in pain has little ability to open up to the world. Like Job in his first response to God, the sufferer turns inward. Such a person needs someone to intervene, to give a vision of hope, to love. God in the whirlwind is such a person. Our greatest challenge in helping a sufferer is to reflect that aggressive love. Our greatest challenge as a sufferer is to accept it.

God is the lover who vindicates the beloved. The restoration of Job's fortunes testifies to the worthiness of his life. This comes in the light of his friends' savage attempts to find evil and guilt in him. Because he holds fast to his integrity, he is not abandoned to an angry, lonely death. God says, by making the restoration, that the reward of such integrity is happiness. There is no sad ending.

It is too simplistic to say that the Lord will bless the sufferer. It is more to the point to say that as the sufferer struggles, calling out to God, then that person eventually discovers a new dimension. Job's integrity pushed him to a greater honesty with himself and with God. It allowed him an opportunity for a new exploration of faith. Our integrity, likewise, prepares us for a new life. That life comes from God, who vindicates our pain with a passionate love.

The new life discovered in suffering is nothing less than the kingdom of God. The closing verses of the book are deceptive. In listing Job's new fortune, they mention two radical things. Job's family and friends discover a new faith in God, and the daughters born to him are accorded equality with men. Such events point to more than a happy ending. They point to this realization: Wherever the sufferer encounters God, life will never be the same again. It will take on earthshaking proportions.

Perhaps this is the last—and best—word Job gives to the sufferer. In the enduring of pain, with honesty and with questioning, the sufferer catches a glimpse of the Kingdom. Words like faith, forgiveness, justice, and hope are no longer well-worn clichés. They are life-changing realities. Even if the suffering leads to death, the new life is still affirmed. That is because God—from the whirlwind of our lives—will never stop confronting us until we say, with Job, I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee (42:5).