

Is God for me or against me?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 February 2026

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Well, if you want to just turn back to chapter 15, and that's where we're going to begin working through. It'd be helpful to have a Bible open in front of you. Why did she get cancer?

Asks the husband with young wife and young children. Why has dementia robbed me of my husband? Asks the elderly wife.

Why is our child handicapped? Ask the exhausted parents. Why was my childhood so difficult?

Asks the maladjusted adult.

Why did I lose my job? Asks the hard-working employee. I guess we could go on and on and on, couldn't we, with many other instances of terrible suffering.

And just wonder why. And I'm sorry if suffering is real or raw for you right now, but as we turn again to the book of Job, you'll notice from our reading of it that we can't really downplay the reality of suffering in our world or in our lives, can we?

[1 : 04] And so to speak only of suffering as a philosophical problem, when it is also a deeply personal one, would be wrong. Suffering is painful and it is perplexing.

And I know that many of you are well aware of that. And so we can't treat suffering as if it is no big thing. It is. And we don't do justice to the book of Job or to the message of Job, which really helps us grapple with the issue of struggling and suffering in a real way.

Because what we see in Job is an innocent sufferer. Somebody who's trying to figure out why he is suffering. And behind every why question that Job asks, there's a desire to figure out what God is doing.

And behind every why question that we ask, I'm sure there is that same desire. Is God for me or against me? What is God's involvement or perhaps his lack of involvement in my suffering?

That's maybe what you are asking. And that is really what is at the heart of this long debate between Job and his friends. But the good news is, as we listen to Job debate with his friends, there is an answer to that question, is God for me or against me?

[2 : 23] And we'll see that answer. And we'll see where God is in our suffering as we look at these chapters together. And so I'd like us to look at this big chunk, chapters 15 through to 21 under three headings.

First of all, wanting comfort. Second, miserable comfort. And third, ultimate comfort. So first of all, wanting comfort. Remember, Job is a true believer in God.

And so his speeches or his cries for help are from a man who knows God and knows what God is like. And Job is convinced that God is sovereign, God is in control, and also that God is just.

But he struggles to understand why he is suffering. And so his speeches, as we read them, you'll notice that they are a mix, a blend, of strong confessions of faith in some of his statements, but also serious confusion about his experiences.

And it's all mixed up together. And so as Job seeks to discover whether God is for him or whether God is against him, Job will not be fobbed off with simplistic answers to suffering.

[3 : 29] And neither should you or I be fobbed off with pat answers when it comes to suffering. And so that's why we've got this really long and heated debate, this argument between Job and his friends.

And so just a quick reminder, if you weren't here last week, about the style and the substance of the speeches in the book of Job. Last time we saw there were three cycles of speeches.

So first cycle, chapter 4 to 14, which we looked at last week. Second cycle, chapter 15 to 21, which we'll look at this week. And then the third cycle, chapter 22 to 27, which we'll look at next week.

And in each of these three cycles, one of the friends speaks to Job. They all come in the same order. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar. And then Job responds to each of his friends.

And they basically keep saying the same stuff, and they say it in similar ways. That's why we're taking such big chunks. And what Job wants and what Job needs is comfort from his friends. [4 : 34] But his friends speak a whole load of rubbish, and Job gets no comfort from his friends. And you remember we mentioned God's verdict on the speeches last week at the end of the book in chapter 42, verse 7.

We read this, So what God does is he rebukes the friends for not speaking what is true. And God also commends Job for speaking the truth. And the friends just can't get their heads around the fact that Job is an innocent sufferer. And we know this because of what happens in chapters 1 and 2, where, if you remember, God gives Satan permission to allow Job to suffer. And yet neither Job nor his friends know this. And so the friends believe Job suffers because he has done something wrong. And that's their moral framework for understanding suffering. And it's the moral framework that most people tend to adopt, where you're rewarded for being good in life, and you're punished and you suffer for being bad in life.

[5 : 49] So good things happen to bad people, and bad things happen to good people. That tends to be how people think. Sorry, good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people.

That tends to be how people think. And so there's no room for innocent suffering in that kind of framework. But that's far too simple, isn't it? But it's also completely wrong, which means you will never get any comfort in your suffering by thinking this way.

You will never be comforted by thinking, well, I'm suffering, therefore I must have done something wrong to deserve this. Or the flip side, I'm being blessed. I've got a good life.

I must have done something well in the past to earn this. That's wrong. Because when you think you're doing well, and suffering comes, and you're left in despair, and you have no hope, and so we'll see this in chapters 15 to 21.

So that's wanting comfort. Second point, which is a longer point than the first point, just to warn you, is miserable comfort. And remember, that's what Job calls his friends.

[6 : 59] In chapter 16, verse 2, he calls them miserable comforters. And the reason is that they think Job is suffering because he's done something wrong. And so their basic argument doesn't change.

But the less they say in the second cycle of speeches, the more hurtful to Job they become, even vindictive towards Job.

So just think, the first cycle, they've already stuck the knife into Job. Now, second cycle, they're twisting it. So first of all, Eliphaz chapter 15, he speaks first, and the gloves are off, and he attacks Job.

And so his message is, Job, you're not wise, you're basically wicked. 15 verse 2, would a wise person answer with empty notions, or fill their belly with the hot east wind?

And so he accuses Job of evil motives. Verse 5, your sin prompts your mouth, you adopt the tongue of the crafty. And so he says, Job condemns himself.

[8 : 00] Verse 6, your own mouth condemns you, not mine. Your own lips testify against you. Now, ironically, Eliphaz's words condemn him.

But he's convinced he's right, and he's convinced that Job's wrong. So look at 15 verse 9 and 10. What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have?

The gray-haired and the aged are on our side. So rather than comfort Job, he's turned it into a contest and into sides. And yet he's got nothing new to say.

And he repeats the same old argument in verse 17 down to verse 35. And he basically sounds like a broken record player, which I thought was a good illustration.

And I thought, nobody knows what a record player is these days if you're under the age of about 30. But anyway, one of those old things, museum pieces, you know, when the record's scratched, it just says the same line again and again and again.

[8 : 59] That's just what Job's friends are like here. And what they're repeating is that people suffer because of their wickedness. So Job, by implication, you're suffering, therefore that means you are wicked.

So look at verse 20 of chapter 15. All his days, the wicked man suffers torment. And then what Eliphaz does is he paints this picture of a wicked man.

And as you read the description of his wicked man in the rest of chapter 15, this man sounds just like Job. Because what he says echoes Job's experience. And so the implication is obvious. What happens to wicked people, Job, has happened to you, so you're a wicked man. But Eliphaz has got it wrong because it's not just wicked people who suffer.

And so Job responds to this in chapter 16 and 17. So turn over to 16 and 17. There's no doubt what Job thinks about his friends and their speeches. Chapter 16, verse 2 and 3.

[10:02] I have heard many things like these. You are miserable comforters, all of you. Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?

So Job's friends have spoken in a cold and in a condescending way. But Job doesn't just think his friends are against him. Here's the point. What hurts Job most is not just his friends being against him, but he feels that God is against him.

And so his speech wrestles with God's role in his suffering. And so look at chapter 16, verse 7 to 9. Surely, God, you have worn me out.

You have devastated my entire household. You have shriveled me up, and it has become a witness. My godness rises up and testifies against me.

God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me. My opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. Look down.

[11:05] That's how Job feels God is treating him. And then verse 11. God has turned me over to the ungodly and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.

So Job thinks he's suffering because God is angry with him and God is against him. But we know, as the reader, Job could not be further from the truth.

And yet there's a relentlessness to his suffering that feels like God is constantly attacking him. So verse 12. All was well with me, but he shattered me.

He seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target. Verse 13. His archers surround me without pity. He pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground.

Again and again, he bursts upon me. He rushes at me like a warrior. Brutal language, isn't it? That's how he feels God is treating him. And yet, what is interesting is that Job hasn't given up on God because he still, yes, he complains to God, but he also cries out to God for help.

[12:13] So look at verse 19 to 21. Even now my witness is in heaven. My advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend. As my eyes pour out tears to God, on behalf of a man, he pleads with God as one pleads for a friend.

Now earlier in chapter 9, Job longed for an arbiter, a mediator, a go-between between himself and God. And now he's aware of somebody, somebody who can plead his case before God.

So he believes this witness who will help him is based in heaven in the very presence of God. And he is like an advocate who will testify for him.

And so what we see in the darkness of Job's speech is this ray of hope, a glimmer, but it's becoming a ray. It's getting stronger and shining out brighter.

And yet, Job's still suffering, and he still knows he's got to face the enemy of death. So look at the end of chapter 16 into chapter 17.

[13:19] Only a few years will pass before I take the path of no return. My spirit is broken. My days are cut short. The grave awaits me. What Job hopes for is the grave.

He wants to die. So chapter 17, verse 13 says, If the only hope I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in the realm of darkness.

What he's speaking about here is Sheol, this place in the Old Testament that is the underworld, like in Stranger Things. It's the place of the dead, the place that nobody wants to go to.

And Job feels that is all that's left for him. He's suffering, and then he'll die. But listen to what he cries out, chapter 17, verse 15 and 16.

Where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death while we descend together into the dust? So he's saying, Will I just die without any answers to my questions?

[14:26] It's an expression of his anguish, of his confusion that comes from his suffering. So on the one hand, he's confident in God, but on the other hand, he's complaining to God because God just seems silent.

Like he's up and down, and he's up and down. But isn't that what suffering does to us, even as a believer? We know that God is there, but God doesn't seem to be doing anything whilst we are

suffering.

Now, spoiler alert, God never, ever, when you read Job, God never gives Job an answer to his suffering.

Which should humble us, because you may be wanting to find answers for your suffering, so don't be surprised if they never come. We may not make sense of our struggle and our suffering in this life, but what the book of Job teaches us is never to give up on God.

Even if God seems silent, or even if we are not sure what he is doing, in fact, when we aren't sure what he is doing, we must cling to him even more.

[15 : 40] And so, Job ends his speech, there, chapter 17, and then Bildad, he then takes up things again in chapter 18. And what Bildad does here is he gives this terrifying description of God's righteous judgment on the wicked.

Where the implication is, Job, you are being punished because you are wicked. Now, basically, when you read chapter 18, Bildad is preaching a fantastic, but terrifying sermon on hell. Because what he gives here is an accurate portrayal of what hell is like because it matches the rest of the Bible. And so, just look down, verse 5 and 6, chapter 18, hell is a place of total darkness. The lamp of a wicked man is snuffed out. The flame of his fire stops burning. The light in his tent becomes dark. The lamp beside him goes out. Darkness. Hell is also a place of inescapable punishment.

Verse 7 to 10, the vigor of his steps is weakened. His own schemes throw him down. His feet thrust him into a net. He wanders into its mesh. A trap seizes him by the heel.

[16 : 50] A snare holds him fast. A noose is hidden for him on the ground. A trap lies in his path. Inescapable punishment. Very often, I've heard people say, oh, it's great when I'm in hell.

I'll be there with all my pals and it'll be good fun. We'll all be together. That's not the description of hell we get here, is it? Hell is also a place of terror. Verse 11 to 14, terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step.

Calamity is hungry for him. Disaster is ready for him when he falls. It eats away parts of his skin. Death's firstborn devours his limbs. He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors.

Awful, isn't it? And then hell's also a place of destruction. Verse 15 and 16, fire resides in his tent. Burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling.

His roots dry up below and his branches wither above. And then hell is a place of separation. Verse 17 to 20, the memory of him perishes from the earth.

[17 : 56] He has no name in the land. He is driven from light into the realm of darkness and is banished from the world. He has no offspring or descendants among his people. No survivor where once he lived.

People of the west are appalled at his fate. Those of the east are seized with horror. It's a frightening description, isn't it? Of the wicked. A description of all those who don't know God, who don't believe in God, who don't trust in Jesus Christ.

And so Bildad's application of his sermon on hell is, Job, this is your life, mate. You're experiencing the terrors of hell right now whilst you're living, which means, Job, you're wicked and you're bound for hell forever.

And his sucker punches there in verse 21, surely such is the dwelling of an evil man, such is the place of one who does not know God. Well, with friends like that, who needs enemies?

Now, Bildad is actually spot on in his description of hell, but he is wrong in suggesting that Job should go there, that Job deserves it.

[19 : 05] Because the reality is that believers like Job can and do suffer terribly in this life. We all know that, or we should know that.

And so Job replies in chapter 19. And here he starts complaining against God. And yet there's this great shaft of light at the end of chapter 19 where Job has confidence in his Redeemer.

And so we'll go through the speeches and then we'll come back, circle back to the Redeemer he describes here. So Job begins chapter 19, his speech, by asking his friends how long they're going to keep attacking him.

Verse 2 to 4, How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me. Shamelessly you attack me. If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone.

So he's complaining against his friends, but again his real complaint is against God. Verse 6, Then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.

[20 : 08] Complaining against God. And so if God is sovereign, as Job does believe, then the only conclusion that he can draw is that God is against him.

He describes God attacking him in the most graphic of ways in verse 7 to 12. So chapter 19, verse 7, Though I cry violence, I get no response.

Though I call for help, there is no justice. No response to Job. No justice Job feels for him. He feels trapped by God in verse 8. He's been stripped of his honor in verse 9.

He's been broken and left helpless and hopeless in verse 10. He feels God's anger is directed against him. In verse 11, His anger burns against me.

He counts me among his enemies. So Job thought that God was his friend. But it feels like God is his enemy. Look at verse 12.

[21 : 07] His troops advance in force. They build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent. What an image. Here's poor Job with his one-man tent.

And here is God surrounding him with his powerful army. Job doesn't stand a chance. And he feels God is attacking him with full force and he can't escape.

He feels completely isolated. So in verse 13, he says, He has alienated my family from me. My acquaintances are completely estranged from me.

He's all alone. No family. They're all dead. His friend's absolutely useless. And he's the object of contempt and of ridicule.

And just feels like God has abandoned him. Verse 21. Have pity on me, my friends. Have pity, for the hand of God has struck me.

[22 : 07] But if you've been reading Job from the beginning, you'll know that it wasn't the hand of God that struck Job. Remember the discussion in chapters 1 and 2 between God and Satan. The Lord said to Satan, He is in your hands, but you must spare his life.

So it was Satan who attacked Job. But only within the constraints that God had set out. And so God did allow Job to suffer in his wisdom in order to achieve his greater purposes.

And so it says, Job grapples with his suffering. He questions whether God is for him or against him. And yet his feelings don't represent the facts.

God wasn't against him. God wasn't angry with him. God wasn't attacking him. God was always for Job, never against him.

Even if that's what it felt like for Job. And so I think there's a lesson here for us when we are perplexed by our suffering. Our suffering, your suffering, my suffering, doesn't mean that God is against us or that God is angry with us or that God is attacking us.

[23 : 18] Just because we can't see a reason why God allows suffering, that doesn't mean there won't be one. That's what Job teaches us.

And then chapter 20, Zophar speaks. And his speech is very similar to Bildad's in chapter 18, where again, the point he makes is God punishes the wicked. So Job, you must be wicked too.

And Zophar says, it's always been this way. Look at verse 4 and 5. Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since mankind was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.

So Zophar claims that the joy of the wicked is short-lived, and they perish forever. Verse 7, he will perish forever like his own dung. Those who have seen him will say, where is he?

Just disappears because he's wicked. And he says, what's more, in verse 10, they leave their children behind and they leave not much behind for their children and so their children are forced to beg.

[24 : 26] His children must make amends to the poor. His own hands must give back his wealth. And Zophar is saying here, all sorts of terrible things happen to wicked people.

In verse 12 to 19, so the wicked people can't escape God's wrath. Verse 23, when he has filled his belly, God will vent his burning anger against him and rain down his blows on him.

Wicked people might try to run but they can't hide. Verse 24, though he flees from an iron weapon, a bronze-tipped arrow pierces him. Zophar concludes that the wicked have no hope.

Verse 29, such is the fate God allots the wicked, the heritage appointed for them by God. Now, of course, Zophar's right to say that God will punish the wicked but his logic is that he is suggesting because Job's experience mirrors the wicked, then Job must therefore be wicked.

But he's wrong. So yes, God will ultimately punish the wicked but God doesn't do it in some kind of tit-for-tat way like Zophar thinks.

[25 : 37] And so Job responds to this in chapter 21 by making the point that the wicked do actually prosper. In the real world, wicked people are often living the dream.

They get everything, they get away with everything. They don't suffer and die and have awful lives and face judgment for their wickedness. In this life, good things do happen to bad people.

And that's summed up in verse 7 which is really the heart of Job's speech in chapter 21. Look at what he says. Why do the wicked live on growing old and increasing in power?

So it's not just that the wicked don't face God's punishment immediately. It is that the wicked live on, they grow old and they increase in power.

So Job's making the point, wicked people do prosper. And you know that and I know that. Job's friends don't seem to realize that.

[26 : 41] That's just how it is. And so what Job does is he sets out the evidence to prove this. So he says, verse 8, the wicked have big and prosperous families.

They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. The wicked have secure homes. Verse 9, their homes are safe and free from fear. The rod of God is not on them. Their business ventures are successful. Verse 10, their bulls never fail to breed, their cows, calf, and do not miscarry. Their lives are basically just one big happy party.

Verse 11 and 12, they send forth their children as a flock, their little ones dance about. They sing to the music of the tambourine and lyre and make merry to the sound of the pipe. Job says, so they enjoy life but also they die peacefully in their sleep.

Verse 13, they spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. But not only do the wicked prosper, Job says, what is worse is that they could not care less about God.

[27 : 47] Verse 14 and 15, yet they say to God, leave us alone. We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?

Job's saying, the wicked mock God and get away with it. That was his world then, that is our world now. And Job's saying, these are all undeniable facts.

You've got to see them. So the friends are wrong. The wicked don't just prosper in this life. Job says, they even prosper in death. Because in death, they're honored.

When I was in Ukraine a few years ago, before the war with Russia, I was amazed at all the statues of Joseph Stalin that were around the place.

Unbelievable. Joseph Stalin was an evil man. Everybody knew it and yet he was honored, not just in his life, but also in his death. And Job is saying, that is the reality for the wicked.

[28 : 48] And so what he does is he wraps up by proving to his friends that their reasoning is absolutely rubbish. Verse 34 of 21. So how can you console me with your nonsense?

Nothing is left of your answers but falsehoods. Job's friends are wrong to see Job suffering and jump to the conclusion that Job is wicked.

This fallen world that we live in means it is never as simple as that. Good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. You can't say that.

We can't easily equate suffering with God's punishment for doing something wrong and nor should we ever equate prosperity with God's favor for doing something right.

Many faithful believers do go through some terrible suffering and many truly wicked people who mock God do live long lives and also die peacefully in their sleep.

[29 : 50] And so it's miserable comfort to suggest anything else. So on to our third point. Wanting comfort, miserable comfort, comfort, and then ultimate comfort. Whilst the miserable comfort comes from Job's friends in chapters 15 to 21, the ultimate comfort comes from Job's words in chapter 19 when he says at the end, I know that my Redeemer lives.

Job 19 verse 25. So amidst all the complaints of Job's speech, there is this shaft of light with Job's words about God. But this is not just comfort for Job.

It is, but this is also comfort for us too in our life, in our suffering, as we face death. So verse 25, chapter 19, I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

This is an amazing confession of faith by Job. Job is confident that he will be vindicated by God because there is a Redeemer.

And this expands upon the mediator that Job longed for. Remember in chapter 9, verse 23, somebody to arbitrate between himself and God. And this expands upon the witness that Job knew

was in heaven in chapter 16, verse 19, somebody who would advocate and testify on Job's behalf. [31 : 16] And now Job looks forward to the Redeemer who will see him through death and into the very presence of God. So who's the Redeemer? Well, the Redeemer can be no less than God himself.

Who but God could negotiate with God? The word for Redeemer here in Hebrew is the word *goel*. It's got the sense of avenger or defender or champion.

And it's the same word that's used in other places in the Old Testament, like in the book of Ruth, where Boaz is described as Ruth's Redeemer. Why? Well, because he defended Ruth and legally made sure that justice was done for her.

And that's the role of the Redeemer. And so Job knows he has a Redeemer in God himself who will work like a legal advocate on his behalf.

But it's clear from Job's words that he hopes for more than just legal representation because his Redeemer will do far more for him. His Redeemer will give him life beyond death.

[32 : 27] Because Job says that in the end he will stand on the earth literally this is saying his Redeemer will stand on the dust which can stand for earth but in poetic literature in the Old Testament including here in Job it symbolically speaks of the grave.

So standing on the earth standing on the grave standing on the grave here this dust is about the grave it's about death. And Job is saying this Redeemer will stand on the grave.

In other words he will triumph over death. He'll trample on the grave. I know that my Redeemer lives. So he's not only alive but he can destroy death.

And of course all of this is pointing to Jesus Christ and to his death and his resurrection. And so here in Job is one of the glimpses of resurrection hope in the Old Testament.

And that's why it's not just wishful thinking on Job's part because this is the ultimate hope for him. This is the ultimate comfort for him.

[33 : 42] But it is also the ultimate hope and the ultimate comfort for all of humanity including you and me. And it all comes in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ.

I love Handel's Messiah. Handel the great composer captures this well in the Messiah in the song I know that my Redeemer liveth. Because what he does is he sticks these verses from Job chapter 19 alongside those great words in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 about the resurrection of Jesus and what that means for us.

He sticks them together and I'm not going to sing it but here are the words I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and though worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God for now is Christ risen from the dead the first fruits of them that sleep.

So Job was confident that he would see God. Look at verse 26 and 27 and after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh I will see God I myself will see him with my own eyes I and not another. That's the answer to Job's suffering isn't it? I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes. So Job yes he knows he will succumb to physical death.

[35 : 08] His skin would be destroyed just like all of ours will be. His body would die just like all our bodies will die but he knows that the great enemy of death is not the end.

His redeemer would see him through death and into the very presence of God. But not in some kind of disembodied existence kind of floating about as a spirit with some clouds and some harps and all of that nonsense that you get which is a picture of heaven.

Job is saying no I'll see God with these eyes physical eyes in my flesh in a body I will see God I'll be able to hug my children who've died because we will be able to touch each other.

Because when Jesus returns we will be raised to life with resurrected bodies that are fit for eternity. Because this body I'm living in your bodies they're not fit really for much are they?

Let's be honest. But the resurrection body will see us through eternity. And so for Job well yeah there is the sense of being abandoned by God.

[36 : 26] He feels that in his suffering but he knows this will change into an intimate relationship with God where he will see God in a body and dwell with him.

That's what the Bible teaches in the New Testament. God's ultimate comfort as Tolkien puts it in the Lord of the Rings at the end is that everything sad will come untrue.

And this certain future hope is what God's word promises to us. It's what Job longs for. Actually we all long for it.

