

THE BOOK OF JOB

III. The Story

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies

3 Dialogue Cycles : Job chapters 4 - 27

1. a. Eliphaz / Job → b. Bildad / Job → c. Zophar / Job (chs. 4-14)
2. a. Eliphaz / Job → b. Bildad / Job → c. Zophar / Job (chs. 15-21)
3. a. Eliphaz / Job → b. Bildad / Job (chs. 22-27)

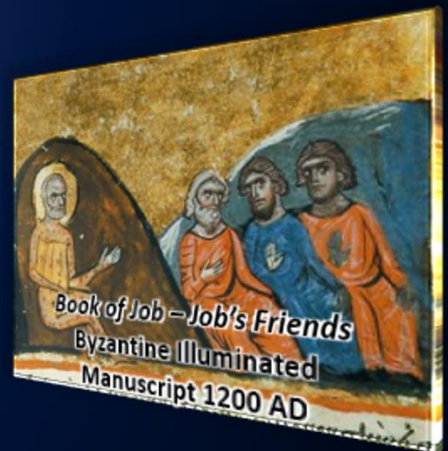
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III. The Story

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies

(chaps. 4 – 27)

- The extended dialogue between Job & his friends leads readers through a consideration of the meaning of human suffering, the justice & purposes of God, & the limits of human wisdom.
- The author does not present Job's friends as caricatures or unserious counselors, but they are representatives of a rigid approach to traditional, patriarchal wisdom.



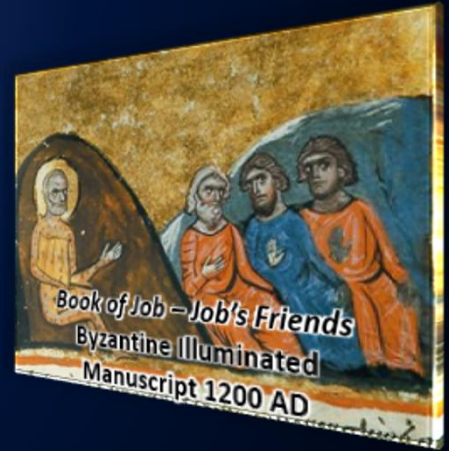
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(chaps. 4 – 27)

- A key component of their conceptual framework is their belief in inflexibility of the “doctrine of retribution”: the upright are always blessed by God & the wicked are always punished, in this life. There are no exceptions.
- Because of their frame of mind, they cannot adapt their thinking to Job's particular plight & so they move inexorably from consolation to condemnation.



The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Eliphaz – first speech (chaps. 4– 5)
 - Eliphaz's 1st speech is the only one that has any attempt at compassion or understanding for Job.
 - Eliphaz resists blaming Job specifically, giving as the reason for Job's suffering the limitations & general sinfulness of all men. **Before God, no human being is righteous.**
 - He encourages Job to “appeal to God”—to repent, that God may restore his health & fortune. Ironically, if Job did this, he would be proving Satan right—Job served God only for the benefits he gave Job.



The Counsel of Job's Friends & Job's Replies

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Job's reply (chaps. 6– 7)



- Job continues to lament his suffering & lack of compassion from his friends, yet he refuses to “appeal to God” for restoration; he is concerned about his relationship to God and so seeks vindication.
- He accuses God of excessive harshness towards him.
- Job is moving from self-pity to anger.

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Bildad – first speech (chap. 8)



- Bildad is harsh from the beginning. He calls Job's eloquent anguish “blustering wind” & says Job's children must have gotten what they deserved, since God does not “pervert justice.”
- Speaking from within the framework of the doctrine of retribution, like Eliphaz, Bildad also encourages Job to repent that his fortunes may be restored.

The Counsel of Job's Friends & Job's Replies

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Job's reply (chaps. 9-10)



- Job believes he is being punished unfairly & God has not told him what charges there are against him.
- Knowing he cannot prove his innocence to God, Job contemplates the possibility of an “umpire”—a mediator—who could reconcile him with God.
- We now see Job moving between despair & hope.

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Zophar—first speech (chap. 11)



- Zophar continues to bear down on the doctrine of retribution, reaching the conclusion that Job is indeed suffering for his own hidden sin: **God directly punishes every evildoer.**
- Zophar, like the other friends, urges Job to repent so that his health, wealth, and status may be restored. Like the others, Zophar also unknowingly supports Satan's position by encouraging Job to seek God for personal gain.

The Counsel of Job's Friends & Job's Replies

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies (The first cycle – chaps. 4 – 14)

- Job's reply (chaps. 12-14)



- Job sees that his friends have not taken into account his particular & unique experience. They are guilty of misapplied teaching & shallow platitudes.
- He expresses hope, even musing on the possibility of resurrection, but then turns back to despair in contemplating the finality of death. Yet he refuses to compromise his integrity & "his struggling faith now & then compels him to make remarkable assertions of his faith in God" (Hartley).

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies


(Second and third cycles – chaps. 15 – 27)

- The second cycle (chaps. 15-21) contains another full round of speeches—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar still have much to say, though their speeches are all shorter.
 - In the first cycle, Job's friends sought to comfort him by teaching him God's wisdom & encouraging him to repent. In this round of speeches his friends grow increasingly impatient with Job, suspecting him of serious hidden sin.
 - They encourage him to repent, lest he undergo yet greater suffering

The Counsel of Job's Friends & Job's Replies

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies

(Second and third cycles – chaps. 15 – 27)

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- Job maintains his integrity & refuses to repent of sins he has not committed.
 - Job insists that the evidence shows that the doctrine of retribution in this life is not absolute; sometimes the wicked prosper & live in peace.
 - Despite his anguish & agonizing laments, Job still expresses his faith in God as his witness & even his redeemer (19:25-27).

The counsel of Job's friends & Job's replies


(Second and third cycles – chaps. 15 – 27)

- The third cycle (chaps. 22-27) continues in the same vein as the others, but there is no speech from Zophar.
 - Job's "friends" now outright condemn him. Without evidence Eliphaz accuses him of a list of sins, and still urges Job to repent: "Submit to God & be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you" (22:21).
 - Bildad barely speaks. He only reminds Job that, compared to God, human beings are like "maggots" & "worms".

The Counsel of Job's Friends & Job's Replies

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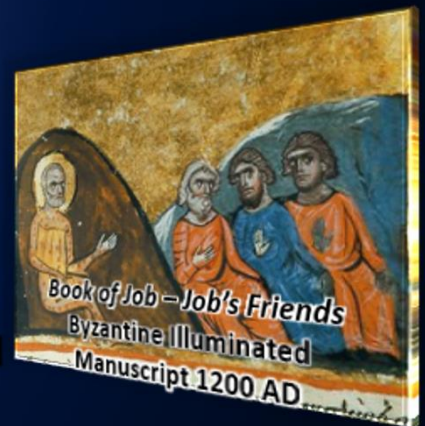
(Second and third cycles – chaps. 15 – 27)

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 - Job still insists on his innocence. He still cannot discern God's purposes, but he expresses the hope that God sees and knows him: "He knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (23:10).
 - Job realizes "that he cannot have peace with God by seeking God for the blessings he gives rather than for God himself" (Hartley).
- Job knows that he can gain no help from his friends. The only way for him out of his anguish is to argue his case before God, who he is convinced would acquit an upright man.
- Job holds onto his faith due to his exalted view of God & his trust in God's justice and mercy despite his own suffering. He is buffeted by this paradox that the God he believes will restore him is also the One who has caused his bitterness and affliction.

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- The friends began with preconceived ideas. They began not with what they saw, but with what they presumed to be true.
- Their wisdom was not all wrong, but they did not know what they did not know & misapplied what they did know.
- They equated their limited knowledge with the mind of God. They "know" God would never cause a righteous man to suffer like Job.
- They made no allowance for God's patience, purposes, plans, or final judgment.



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