

Chapters 3-31 are the largest section of the book. They contain the speeches between Job and his three friends. There are three cycles in this section.

Job's opening speech —3

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Eliphaz—4 & 5	Eliphaz—15	Eliphaz—22
Job—6 & 7	Job—16–17	Job—23–24
Bildad—8	Bildad—18	Bildad—25
Job—9 & 10	Job—19	Job—26–31
Zophar—11	Zophar—20	Zophar—(silence)
Job—12–14	Job—21	

It needs to be clearly stated that the period of testing for Job is over. He survived the tests presented in chapters 1 and 2. The rest of the book is Job trying to figure out why he is suffering when he did nothing to deserve it.

The first speech (chapter 3) is the spectacle of human misery. Job is stunned because he cannot deny that it is the Lord who has done all this to him. Twice Job has attributed his suffering to God. Job 1:21: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away." Job 2:10: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"

He realizes how wretched human existence can be. The verses that follow are painful to read.

***3:1 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.***

***3:2 And Job said:***

***3:3 "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'***

Chapter 3, like the rest of the speeches, is poetry. It is elaborate and exaggerated, and follows a style typical of wisdom literature.

After seven days of suffering in silence (Job. 2:13), Job finally opens his mouth. Job cannot see any reason for being created if there is going to be so much misery, so he curses both the night he was conceived and the day he was born. His conception and birth together constitute his origin. In short, he wishes he had never existed. This, of course, is a protest against God because "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away" (1:21).

***3:4 Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it.***

***3:5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.***

***3:6 That night- let thick darkness seize it! Let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months.***

The poetic nature of the speech is seen in verses 4-6 as the words for "darkness" pile up ("deep darkness," "clouds," "blackness," "night," "thick darkness").

Before God created the heavens and the earth there was only darkness (Gen. 1:1-2). With the creation of light, a day came into being (Gen. 1:3-5). This cycle of darkness and light is the pattern of every new day that comes into existence. Job wishes that the darkness had prevailed on the day of his birth,

preventing that day from becoming a day at all. If only God had ignored that day and did not cause the sun to rise upon it (3:4b)! Let it be removed from the calendar altogether (3:6)! Let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months.

**3:7 Behold, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry enter it.**

**3:8 Let those curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan.**

**3:9 Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none, nor see the eyelids of the morning,**

**3:10 because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide trouble from my eyes.**

In verses 7-10 Job continues to despise his existence.

In verse 7, he says, let the night of his conception be barren; let it produce nothing! He says, "let no joyful cry enter it." He doesn't want that night to provide any reason for anyone to rejoice; this would include any expression of joy his parents may have over his conception.

Verse 8 is difficult, but the gist of it is that Job wants people who invoke curses (sorcerers?) to rouse Leviathan (a great sea monster) to interfere with or devour the day of his birth.

There are only a handful of references to the Leviathan in the Old Testament. Most passages describe Leviathan as a real creature. For example, Psalm 104:25-27 says, "Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. These all look to you, to give them their food in due season." Job 41 describes Leviathan in great detail; however, to the average person, Leviathan was viewed as a sea monster and was figuratively used of something that opposed God's rule. Isaiah 27:1 says, "In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." In Psalm 74:13-14, the power of God is exalted in His ability to crush Leviathan: "You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness."

In verse 9, "the stars of the dawn" are most likely the planets (especially Venus, when visible in the east) that shine more brightly as the night comes to an end and morning is about to break. Let the darkness stop the morning stars from shining and the new day from "opening its eyes" (3:10).

Because the day of his birth had failed to keep the doors of his mother's womb shut (it failed to keep her from conceiving and him from being born; 3:10b), he wants that day to never awaken. It was his birth that led to the trouble he is experiencing.

**3:11 "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?"**

**3:12 Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?**

**3:13 For then I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,**

**3:14 with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuilt ruins for themselves,**

**3:15 or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver.**

**3:16 Or why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light?**

**3:17 There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.**

**3:18 There the prisoners are at ease together; they hear not the voice of the taskmaster.**

**3:19 *The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.***

In verse 11 Job's speech changes from cursing to questioning. Job is thinking out loud. He asks, "Why didn't I just die at birth?" If life is miserable it would have been better not to have been conceived, but since he was conceived, it would have been better not to have been born alive or to die shortly after birth.

It is difficult to know what 3:12a means, but the intent of the verse is clear; Job wishes he was never received or nursed after he had been born; if he had been abandoned, he would have died quickly. He would be in a better state than he is in. He would be with monarchs and others whom had distinguished themselves for a while with their great wealth and power. As he says, "I would have been at rest" (3:13b); in other words, he would be free from the torments of his body and the anguish of mind, which were oppressing him.

Note that in verses 13-19 Job sees death as a great equalizer and a place to escape the miseries of this life. It doesn't matter if you are a king or a slave, rich or poor, or even stillborn; once you go to the grave, all distinctions found in this world will be done away with. In verse 18 he says, "Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout." Though the world is filled with injustice, inequality, and suffering; at least in death people are free from all of these things.

Job is not attempting to give a theology of the afterlife nor is his intent to suggest that there is no punishment of the wicked; his point is that if he were dead, he would escape from his present trials.

For the believer death is often likened to sleep. "We lie down to rest at night with the hopes of awaking again. We sleep calmly, with the expectation that it will be only a temporary repose, and that we shall be aroused, invigorated for augmented toil, and refreshed for sweeter pleasure. So the Christian lies down in the grave." (Barnes).

**3:20 *"Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul,***  
**3:21 *who long for death, but it comes not, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,***  
**3:22 *who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave?***

Light and life in this passage are poetic parallels just as are darkness and misery (Alden, 78).

When life is so filled with suffering, and people wish they could die, why does God keep them alive? Why doesn't He simply take their life away from them and let them go to the grave where they long to be?

**3:23 *Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?***  
**3:24 *For my sighing comes instead of my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water.***  
**3:25 *For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me.***  
**3:26 *I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, but trouble comes."***

In chapters 1 and 2 Job recognized that nothing could have happened to him without God's sanction. He now realizes that his life is sustained by God and he has no choice but to live unless God chooses otherwise. "He feels trapped, 'hedged in'; but he sees that it is God who has hedged him in (3:23). All the while he has enjoyed a hedge around him, protecting him; now that it is gone, he feels hedged in" (Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Perspectives on Suffering and Evil*, 158).

The degree to which we struggle with this question [the question of the innocent suffering] is likely to be related to the extent of our own sufferings. That Job can say, “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me” (3:25) is not a sign that he did not really trust God, and therefore he got what he deserved: that would subvert the purpose of the entire book—in the third chapter, at that! The purpose of these words, rather, is to show that Job had already thought about these matters. He was no amateur in the things of God. He had thought enough about them to know that, from his own observation, from his own knowledge of God, he could not consider himself exempt from the possibility of disastrous loss. Such loss was what he feared. To that extent, he was prepared for it; probably that prepared mind was also one of the reasons why his initial responses are so entirely noble. But thinking through the theology of suffering, and resolving in advance how you will respond, however praiseworthy the exercise, cannot completely prepare you for the shock of suffering itself. It is like jumping into a bitterly cold lake: you can brace yourself for the experience all day, but when you actually jump in, the shock to your system will still snatch your breath away. (Carson, 159-160)

This is the speech that thoroughly alarms Eliphaz, the first of the three friends to speak. Eliphaz will rebuke Job and try to bring him back to what believes is the right way.

***Some thoughts on chapter 3:***

First, Job’s present trials are so severe that he seems to have forgotten the numerous days of blessing that God had given him. The percentage of “happy days” to “bad days” is unbelievably lopsided, yet when trials come people tend to lose all recollection of the years of blessing that they have had. They can only see their present struggles.

Second, Job was a godly man who stood out in his devotion to God beyond any of his peers. Job’s agony shows that the godliest people can be swept away by sorrow. However, his knowledge is too limited to be making comments about what would be best for him. In the end God will correct him.

Third, there is no suggestion that Job is contemplating suicide to free himself of the miseries of his life. Saying, “I wish I hadn’t been born” is not the same thing as taking your own life. The Bible views life and death as the prerogatives of God. Man has no right to take life (not someone else’s life or his own) for all life belongs to God. In fact, in verse 23 Job is complaining that God has hedged him in; that is, He keeps him alive though he wants to die. He is stuck in God’s will that he live.

Last, it is absolutely critical to understand that the Book of Job is addressing a philosophical problem; namely, a righteous man has been given terrible affliction. What does that say about the justice of God?

For Job’s three friends, the answer is simple. God punishes the wicked. God rewards the righteous. This is the doctrine of retributive justice. If a person is suffering, it is because he has sinned and God is punishing him. If a person is prospering, it is because he is righteous. Or, if he is wicked and prospering, he will only prosper for a very little while and then God will bring everything tumbling down. That is their answer to suffering. This is also the understanding that Job has, and this is where the problem lies. We already know from the beginning of the book that this is not the case with Job. He was not suffering because of some evil he did. He was suffering even though he was righteous. Because of this, life no longer made sense to Job.

In other words, the book is not just about suffering. Rather, it will explain that although God appears to be unjust, He is managing the world the way He needs to manage it. There is a righteous solution to all of the suffering, but we have to work through the book in order to get there.

We have an advantage over Job in that we have been given the answers that Job was seeking. We have a clarity that Job did not have. Job's suffering answers our questions about how God works in suffering. Job did not know what had gone on in the courts of heaven; we do. But much more than that, we have the cross - undeniable evidence of God's love for us. Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Had Job lived in our day his perspective would have been different.

Romans 8: 35, 37-39

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### CONCLUSION:

Job knows that he does not deserve the suffering that he is experiencing. He knows (as God Himself has confessed) that he is righteous; he fears God and shuns evil. But now something is wrong. Everything he believed in, all that he built his whole life upon, has collapsed. Job's world view was built upon the structure of retributive justice, now he finds that he is suffering more than anyone else. Therefore, as far as he can tell, the best thing is to be dead. The world has become an alien place, a hostile place, a place that has no orderly structure to it, no underpinning wisdom, no truth that holds it all together. Apparently, bad things just happen for no reason, or simply because God chooses to punish people out of a whim.

To state it differently, Job believes that death is better than life for those who are in misery, but Job's misery is not just in what he has lost; it concerns the fact that his world has fallen apart. He can no longer make sense of the way the world works and the troubles that take place. As Carson says, "The physical suffering, as bad as it is, is compounded in Job's mind because it does not make any sense. Consequently, it threatens to destroy his understanding of God and the world, and is therefore not only massively painful in its own right, but disorienting and confusing."

So, the first part of the book is the most dramatic speech of all in a sense. Job's cursing of the day of his birth is his saying, "It just doesn't make any sense to me anymore, and my world as I understand it is over. I should have been stillborn rather than having to experience all these things."

This book has been given to us so that we do not fall into the fallacy of Job's world view. Suffering has purpose in the plan of God, though presently that purpose may be hidden from us. God is not arbitrary; He does not needlessly inflict pain on His children.