

## Study 5: Job 29-42:6 – ‘Dress for action...’

*The courtroom is full of people with anxious looks on their faces. The prosecution and the defence have summed up their cases, and the judge is about to hand down the decision. The hours of argument are now over. All that's left is to hear the verdict. But what will it be? There's tension in the air. That is the scene that greets us in Job 29-41. Much of Job 1-28 has been taken up in a painstaking argument between Job and his three friends. Job has lost everything but his life, and his friends think that it is because of an unconfessed sin. Job, however, knows this is not to be the case. So for chapter after chapter, they have argued with each other, with no clear winner. But now it's time for the judge's verdict. Before God speaks, however, the two sides sum up their arguments.*

### Read Job 30:15-31 and 31:5-12.

1. Here are two passages that sum up Job's feelings in chapters 29-31. How does Job feel about:
  - a. his suffering?
  - b. himself?
  - c. God?

### Read Job 32:1-33:12.

2. In chapter 32 a new person, Elihu, is now suddenly introduced to us. Elihu serves to sum up the case of Job's friends.
  - a. What can you discover about who Elihu is?
  - b. Why hasn't he spoken until now?

- c. What is Elihu's opinion of Job?

3. Elihu goes on (at considerable length!) to defend God. What are some of the things that he says of God in Job 36:1-9 and 37:14-24?

### “I rest my case.”

*The debate that has raged since chapter 3 is over. Job for his part has rehearsed the terrible extent of his suffering, and again explains how perplexed he is that God would do this to him.*

*On the other side, there is a surprising twist. A young man named Elihu appears out of the blue to enlighten everyone with what he claims is a superior argument (32:14-18). For all his big talk, though, Elihu doesn't really say much that is new. He rightfully defends God's righteousness and justice, but he mistakenly assumes that Job is wrong in claiming to have no secret unconfessed sin.*

*All that is left is for the judge to hand down his verdict. Dress for action!*

### Read Job 38-39.

4. God now speaks. To capture the majesty of his words, we have read what he says in full. Look over God's first speech in chapters 38-39.
  - a. What does God speak about?
  - b. Why do you think God speaks like this?

*At the conclusion of the first speech, God demands an answer from “[h]e who argues with God”—that is, Job (40:1-2). Job doesn’t know what to say, and offers no real answer at all. In response, God then begins a second speech, promising that “I will question you, and you make it known to me” (40:7).*

### **Read Job 40-41**

5. What basic criticism does God make of Job in 40:8-14?

6. How does the material about the behemoth and the leviathan relate to this basic criticism (see especially 41:10-11)?

### **Read Job 42:1-6.**

6. What effect do God’s speeches have on Job?

7. What exactly do you think Job is repenting of?

8. What good thing comes out of the way God speaks to Job (42:5)?

### **God’s verdict**

*The surprising thing is what God doesn’t say. God gives no reason whatsoever to Job as to why he is suffering. God does not tell Job anything about the conversation with Satan in chapters 1-2. Indeed, instead of giving answers to*

*Job, God mainly asks questions— Can you do this? Can you do that? Do you know this? Can you understand that? Question after question after question. God’s words have the effect of completely humbling Job. The questions remind Job of who is God and who isn’t. Job is brought to repentance (42:6).*

*It is important to realize that Job is not repenting of sins that caused his sufferings. We have known from the opening chapter that it was not as a punishment that Job was afflicted. It is not that his friends were right all along and that there was unconfessed sin in his life. What, then, is Job repenting of? During his long series of questions, God says of the leviathan in 41:10-11: “no-one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” in the face of this, Job realizes that he has been presumptuous and demanding towards God. He repents of the sin of not handling his suffering in the right way. He is repenting of ‘hiding’ God’s counsel, and demanding an explanation from God as if God him owed one.*

*All this teaches us two very valuable lessons. Firstly, we are alerted to the danger of being too demanding with God. In Christ, we enjoy great intimacy, boldness and confidence with God, but we must be careful not to fall into the trap of therefore taking God casually or flippantly. We must never forget that we are the creatures and he the Creator. We have no right to question his ways, or complain of his judgements. We belong to him, like all of creation; we have no claim against him that he must pay.*

*Even when we suffer—especially when we suffer—we must remember that perspective. Suffering can be a very crippling experience, and in the middle of pain and grief and loss our world can close in around us. We can become completely engrossed in our problems. But no matter how difficult things may be, it is never an excuse for being disrespectful or presumptuous with God. Certainly, we may pour out our troubles to God, and express to him our confusion and sorrow about why he is doing something. But in our struggles with the hard questions of life, we need to remember our place. He is the judge, not us.*

*But secondly, God’s questions to Job show us that God’s priority is to restore relationship with Job rather than explain to Job why he is suffering. God is more concerned that Job relate to him properly, than with Job knowing the answer to all things. This relates to the important lesson we discovered in our last study: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28). The key to wisdom, to making the best of life, is not to know why things happen. The key is to know the God who knows why things happen. That is what God seeks to do with Job. God’s speeches have the effect of revealing God to Job. He now sees what God is like, and fears God in a way that he never did before.*

## **Implications**

*(Choose one or more of the following to discuss in your group.)*

**9.** What are some practical things we can do that might help prevent us from becoming embittered when we suffer?

**10.** How does the picture God presents of himself in chapters 38-41 compare with how he is often spoken of today among Christians?

**11.** In Job 42:2, we read that “no purpose of yours can be thwarted”. How does this help us deal with suffering and relate rightly to God?

## **Give thanks and pray**

- Thank God that he is the good and righteous judge of all things.
- Pray for those who have been through great suffering, that they would be able to recognize who God is.

## **For further exploration**

The following Bible passages provide positive examples of how to relate to God during difficult times. You may wish to use them in your own life.

- Psalm 57
- Lamentations 3:19-33
- Habakkuk 3:17-19
- Luke 22:39-46