

# Hope Defined

Believers find hope for life only in God.

## JOB 14:1-14

**MEMORY VERSE:** JOB 13:15

**STUDY** Job 14:1-14 to discern the messages shared by Job's three friends and Job's response. Highlight the questions posed by Job in his prayer. Be prepared to introduce Job's friends using **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Friends of Job*).

**CREATE** a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 30–32. Focus on how Job dealt with his adversity and found hope in God's promise of life in heaven and how he reveals the depth of his faith as he prayed to God.

**GATHER** the following items:

- Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)

**Prepare to Display:**

- Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*)
- Pack Item 5** (*Job's Statements of Faith*)
- Pack Item 6** (*Key Verses: Job 13:15-16*)

**Make Copies of:**

- Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Friends of Job*)

**CONSULT** the Explore the Bible website for ways of using a current news event to start and conclude the session ([goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras)).

**REINFORCE** the study by prayerfully evaluating how you have responded to adversity in the past and be prepared to share a testimony with the group.

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Last Things*

The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (1 John 2:28).

## FIRST THOUGHTS

Many people enjoy an athletic competition between teams or individuals who are at the top of their sport. But when a subpar team or player is matched against a juggernaut, we may not tune in, especially if that subpar team is our favorite team. Even the subpar team's players may appear listless because they have lost hope in the contest. Losing hope in the future saps strength in the present. Job 14 highlights that believers will find strength in the present when they look to God and hope only in Him.

(In PSG, p. 19) **Share about a time when your favorite team or player was outmatched going into the contest. What emotions did you observe as the contest unfolded?**

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## BIBLE SKILL

*Compare related passages.*

Job's friends attempted to explain his suffering. Read Job 4:7-8 (Eliphaz); 8:4-6 (Bildad); and 11:13-20 (Zophar), and summarize their explanations of Job's suffering. How do their views of suffering compare to commonly accepted ways of understanding suffering today? Read Job 42:7. What was God's response to the explanations given by Job's friends, and what warning does this serve for us?

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## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **JOB 2:11–14:22**

Between the Book of Job's introduction (1:2–2:13) and conclusion (42:7-17), we are taken on a journey of poetic dialogue that allows us to wrestle with some of the greatest questions of life, suffering, and death. In this week's passage, we find ourselves in the middle of the narrative. In this narrative, the main characters grapple with suffering as it relates to what it reveals about the sufferer and how it squares with God's providential governance of the world.

One of the key questions of the book is this: What is the nature of wisdom and where can it be found? In Job, we understand that the order of the universe is not fully revealed and we must learn to trust in the God who presides over the universe. For this reason, one might argue that the Book of Job is an exploration of the way God works in the world and the appropriate human response to Him.

Each one of Job's friends showed compassion and attempted to comfort Job (2:11), but in the end their words failed. Job's friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—all fell back to the principle of retribution, namely, that whatever people receive in life is a direct result of their behavior. The Book of Job does not contradict this teaching (42:10) but does nuance our understanding of retribution. In this case, God did allow Job to suffer the fate that we might expect to fall on someone openly defiant of God. Therefore, it is perfectly understandable that Job's friends believed that he had done something to deserve such harsh treatment from God. For this reason, they continually urged Job to repent of whatever sin caused this divine anger. As we know from the text, and Job himself knew, he had

done nothing to merit this suffering. In fact, the text for this session begins to unveil Job's wisdom in this matter. Job understood that his situation was unique because of his innocence.

As Job wrestled with despair in chapter 14, we are given a glimpse into the thoughts of a man who endured immense suffering. We must remember where we are in this passage as it relates to the entirety of redemptive history. God has chosen to progressively reveal Himself from Genesis to Revelation. Though Job could not fully see the hope that lies ahead, we will come to see how his story ends. More importantly, we know as believers how the whole story of redemption ends in Jesus Christ. The gospel does not leave us in despair but gives us a sure and steady hope in the face of suffering and death. As we all know, suffering in the world leads the believer to consider the greater questions of life.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### QUESTIONS (JOB 14:1-6)

#### **Verses 1-2**

Job maintained that he had done nothing to deserve his suffering. Even still, God providentially allowed him to walk through unimaginable circumstances. While Job maintained his innocence, he also proclaimed that suffering and adversity should be expected of all humans. The word translated **trouble** in verse 1 carries with it connotations of anxiety, stress, and fear. All men and women live a somewhat brief life, and during this time suffering is a common experience. Even still, our desires for the duration of life often fluctuate based on our circumstances. Even Job seemed to fluctuate on this matter. In different parts of the book he declared that life is too short (9:25-26), and on the other hand that life is too long (7:1-5).

In verse 2, Job focused on the brevity of life and utilized common metaphors to explain this phenomenon. He compared the brevity of life to a **flower** or **shadow**. It seems here that Job was espousing the idea that the brevity of life is not such a bad thing. Flowers are admired for their beauty and the pleasure they bring. Even still, the vibrant colors and life of a flower are fragile and quickly dry out and fade away. Flowers are a common imagery in the Old Testament for the fragility of human life. (See Ps. 103:15-16; Isa. 40:6-8.) The imagery of a shadow is even more austere, seeing that shadows have no substance and quickly disappear. Job's friend Bildad utilized this imagery in Job 8:1-10. Because of the fragility of human life, Job wondered why God even bothered to focus His attention on him (14:3).

#### **Verses 3-6**

With all this in mind, Job felt affirmed in his belief that God is absolutely sovereign over every person and in control of every moment of his or her life. One's days are determined by the wisdom of God and no human can

#### **VERSES 1-2**

<sup>1</sup> Anyone born of woman is short of days and full of trouble. <sup>2</sup> He blossoms like a flower, then withers; he flees like a shadow and does not last.

## VERSES 3-6

<sup>3</sup> Do you really take notice of one like this? Will you bring me into judgment against you?

<sup>4</sup> Who can produce something pure from what is impure? No one!

<sup>5</sup> Since a person's days are determined and the number of his months depends on you, and since you have set limits he cannot pass, <sup>6</sup> look away from him and let him rest so that he can enjoy his day like a hired worker.

cross the limits set by God. Instead of bargaining with God about the duration of his life, Job pleaded with God about the quality of his life. Like he did in 7:19, Job appealed to God for **rest**. He utilized the imagery of a **hired worker** in verse 6. A hired worker labors in difficulty for his pay, and Job believed he had earned enough for one lifetime. For Job it seemed that payday would be the day of his death, the day when his difficult suffering would come to an end.

***God doesn't always deliver us out of suffering, but intends to deliver us through suffering.***

Job had begun to reflect on the brevity of life and the reality of judgment awaiting all people. This judgment is deserved since all humans are impure. Job pleaded for God to leave him alone so he could gain some type of relief from his pain during this short lifetime. From other passages, we are reminded of God's patience and care for His people. So Job's request was certainly not at odds with the grace of God. However, we also understand that in His sovereign providence, God doesn't always deliver us *out of* suffering, but intends to deliver us *through* suffering. The effect of such trials often leads the faithful to cling to God even more tightly. As it has been often said, sometimes we don't realize God is all we need until God is all we have. In this way, we can learn to trust God and see His comfort in times of affliction. These things can be a means God uses to turn our hearts and focus our hopes on Him.

**How does the doctrine of God's sovereignty and belief in His providential rule over the world shape your perspective on suffering and death?**

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## DESPAIR (JOB 14:7-12)

### ***Verses 7-12***

In verse 5, Job began examining the theme of human mortality and continued it here by contrasting it with nature. The first image Job utilized was that of **a tree**. One does not need to be an arborist to understand that trees can be cut down to a stump yet continue to live and grow with the right nutrients and water. If you've ever tried to remove a tree on your property, you know that the stump and its roots can persist in sprouting new vegetation after the body of the tree is gone. Job utilized the language of a **sapling** to illustrate that even old **roots** can bring forth new life. However, it is not this way with humans. When people die, they fade away. Unlike a

tree that can utilize water as a source of life, when a person breathes his or her last breath, no amount of air can bring him or her back to life.

The second contrast in which Job focused was a body of water. As water dries up from the **lake** and a **river** dries up, it is unlikely they will come to life again. It does not seem that Job was allowing for rainfall or other forms of precipitation in his analogy. The same is true of humans. Humanly speaking, once they lie down and die, they will not rise up again. Furthermore, humans will not awake from their sleep **until the heavens are no more**. This ancient expression, *until the heavens are no more*, has been likened to the modern expression “until hell freezes over.” Job was speaking of death as finality. For Job, death has the last word. Death is the final sleep.

### ***Death does not have the last word.***

Humans have a strong will to live, and we should avoid falling into despair over Job’s fatalistic language. His circumstances created the context for his words. His use of artistic metaphor was meant to paint a stark reminder of the last enemy, death. Near the end of the Old Testament, God revealed the concept of a resurrection from the dead. (See Isa. 26:19.) The concept of resurrection is more fully developed in the New Testament. The language after the resurrection of Christ is full of hope for believers. In First Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul reminded us that since Christ has been raised, Christians will also experience their own Easter morning. It is fascinating that, like Job, the New Testament writers often used metaphors from nature and sleep to describe both death and resurrection. Where Job seems to have focused on the natural finality of death, the writers of the New Testament speak to the supernatural victory over death (1 Cor. 15:50-58). In this sense, death does not have the last word. Even though death is an unwelcome enemy, Christians do not weep over death as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

Scripture teaches that all people will be raised physically from the dead on the last day. The difference is that Christians will be raised to everlasting glory; those who do not trust in Christ will be raised to judgment (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). In many ways, the thought of death can be a means God uses to bring people to ask the larger questions of eternity. Implicit in this warning is a certain grace. Every warning before the final judgment is an act of mercy. Job’s reflections in this passage likely mirror the thoughts of those around us who despair over their circumstances. Learning to enter into someone’s suffering and to weep with those who weep can be a powerful aid in ministering to them with the hope of the gospel. Think of how many people in your life have come to faith or returned to faith in the midst of or following a season of suffering.

#### **VERSES 7-12**

<sup>7</sup> There is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its shoots will not die. <sup>8</sup> If its roots grow old in the ground and its stump starts to die in the soil, <sup>9</sup> the scent of water makes it thrive and produce twigs like a sapling. <sup>10</sup> But a person dies and fades away; he breathes his last — where is he? <sup>11</sup> As water disappears from a lake and a river becomes parched and dry, <sup>12</sup> so people lie down never to rise again. They will not wake up until the heavens are no more; they will not stir from their sleep.



**How does the gospel of Christ drive out despair and comfort us in our grief?  
How does this reality distinguish our response to suffering and death from  
the response of unbelievers?**

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## HOPE (JOB 14:13-14)

### Verses 13-14

#### VERSES 13-14

<sup>13</sup> If only you would hide me in Sheol and conceal me until your anger passes. If only you would appoint a time for me and then remember me.

<sup>14</sup> When a person dies, will he come back to life? If so, I would wait all the days of my struggle until my relief comes.

In the previous section, Job portrayed death as the final word in the natural world. Unlike a tree that draws water to sprout new life, a dead person cannot draw breath and return to life. Like a dried up body of water with no natural resources for replenishment, a dead person cannot awake from the sleep of death. Therefore, in reply to Job's question—**if a person dies, will he come back to life?**—we would expect his answer to be *no*. (See Job 10:20-22.) However, verses 13-14 seem to hold out hope; namely, Job wished that death did not have the last word. At the very least, Job wished that death would hide him in **•Sheol** from the anger of God that could have possibly led to all of his suffering.

In the Old Testament, the concept of Sheol depicted the grave or the abode of the dead. Sheol was also considered to be located in the depths of the earth, thus illustrating Job's desire to be hidden until God's anger passed. In fact, some passages indicate that the Old Testament saints spoke of Sheol as the state of being cut off from God (Ps. 88:3-5; Isa. 38:11), while other passages seem to present the opposite (Ps. 139:8). Being the place of the dead, Sheol was considered an inescapable abode, a final destination.

The focus of the present section reveals that Job had reached a new level of despair in his suffering. If we were to isolate Job's thoughts in their scriptural context, it is understandable why he was wallowing in despair. However, these verses also reveal that Job pondered the possibility that he had angered God, even though he did not see himself as deserving of his afflictions. His thought at this point was focused on a desire for his suffering to end, even if it meant his death. Job assumed that if God had time to calm down, he might be shown relief. Job's hope was that if he were gone, God would miss him (14:15b). In essence, Job characterized death as a place to escape suffering. He expressed a longing for life after death, realizing that this future life would come only through God's action.

Keep in mind that this passage is a glimpse into the thoughts of a man who had been driven to despair by his suffering. It is descriptive of Job's current state of mind, not prescriptive for how we are to deal with suffering. It is possible that many believers long for death as relief. But life is a gift from God. Because life is given by God, only God has the right to choose when to take it.

As believers, we find hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ. As believers in Christ, we are hidden from the anger of God against sin. Scripture teaches that Jesus descended to the dead and on the third day rose again. This truth is articulated in passages such as Matthew 12:40 and Ephesians 4:8-10. In these passages, Jesus is depicted as truly dead after His crucifixion, that is, in the grave or in the realm of the dead. The good news of the gospel brings us a clarity of hope that had not yet been fully revealed in the time of Job.

Now that the Bible is complete, we as believers have the advantage of seeing the whole picture. The Bible teaches us that Jesus actually died but rose again and therefore achieved victory over death (2 Tim. 1:10). The Bible also teaches us that Jesus defeated death. If we are in Him, we have nothing to fear or no reason to despair (Heb. 2:14). Finally, we know that Jesus is the firstfruits, the hope of what's to come after death (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Christ leads us through no darker rooms than He went through before. Having tasted death Himself, He can support us while we taste it and take our hands, reminding us: "I've been there before." In Christ, death does not have the last word. Jesus holds the keys of death (Rev. 1:17-19). Furthermore, the only way to be hidden from the just wrath of God against sin is to be hidden in Christ (Col. 3:3). Because of Christ, believers can find hope in God's promise of resurrection life in the presence of God. In fact, the promise of heaven is the sure and solid hope we have in Christ Jesus.

**How does the hope of the resurrection fortify your faith and sustain you in difficult times?**

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# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION

**PREPARE:** Display **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*), **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Job's Statements of Faith*), and **Pack Item 6** (*Key Verses: Job 13:15-16*) to be referenced during the session. Prepare to play the fight song or hold up memorabilia related to a favorite team. An optional idea would be to wear a shirt with your favorite team's logo.

**WELCOME:** Once most have arrived, ask: ***Have you ever attended a sporting event where one team got behind early and appeared to just give up?*** Direct each person to respond to the question with a thumbs up or a thumbs down signal.

**DISCUSS:** Guide the group to describe to a person sitting next to them a time when their favorite team or player was outmatched going into the contest. ***What emotions did you observe as the contest unfolded?*** (PSG, p. 19)

**TRANSITION:** *Similar to how a player's or team's hope wavers during an overwhelming loss, Job reacted to his circumstances in a depressed state.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**CONTEXTUALIZE:** Utilizing Understand the Context (PSG, p. 20) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*), review the previous group time.

**SUMMARIZE:** Briefly recap the dialogues between Job and his three friends while distributing **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Friends of Job*) for use throughout the group time.

**STATE:** *Job desired to stay faithful to the end, but all three of his friends rebuked him. Zophar even called him a hypocrite for claiming he was innocent of their charges. In Job 13:20–14:22, Job poured out his heart in prayer, imploring God to stop persecuting him. He told his friends that if they couldn't help, they should remain silent because the matter was between Job and God.*

**TRANSITION:** *In today's study, we will examine a portion of Job's prayer as he turned to God for hope in his depressing circumstances.*

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**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read **Job 14:1-6**, while the group listens specifically for clues to Job's state of mind.

**IDENTIFY:** Lead the group to identify the two metaphors used by Job as he prayed to God.

**DISPLAY:** Point to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Job's Statements of Faith*). Review the statements Job made as recorded in various chapters of the Book of Job. Then ask: ***How does reflecting on the relatively short duration of human life cause a person to consider some of the greater questions of life?*** (PSG, p. 22)

**GUIDE:** Place the group in pairs. Direct the pairs to reread verses 3-6 to identify the three questions Job asked and his rhetorical response.

**STATE:** *Job recognized he was a sinner before Almighty God. He realized that except for God's grace and mercy, he was hopeless. Job's petition to God was to grant him rest from his sufferings.*



**ASK:** *Why is it good to raise the greater questions of life to God in the face of suffering?*

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**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read **Job 14:7-12**, as the group listens for the contrast Job presented between nature and people.

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to identify key words and phrases that contrast nature and people in these verses.

**DISCUSS:** In teams of two to four people discuss the following questions: **How does Job show us the importance of looking at life from God's perspective rather than our own?** (PSG, p. 24)

**HIGHLIGHT:** Secure responses to this statement from the PSG (p. 25): *Having faith in God does not always mean having the answers to our questions, but it means taking our questions to God who has all the answers. It means trusting in God in spite of the fact that in His providential wisdom He has chosen not to reveal to us all that He is doing.*

**DISCUSS:** **How does keeping our eyes on Christ and His gift of eternal life help us overcome feelings of despair?** (PSG, p. 25)

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**READ:** Read aloud **Job 14:13-14** as the group listens to determine Job's transition from despair to hope.

**STATE:** *Job asserted that if he could hope in a resurrection from the dead, then he would wait on God until his relief would happen.* (PSG, p. 26)

**ASK:** *Why is putting one's hope in God the only reliable way to face feelings of despair?* (PSG, p. 26)

**DISPLAY:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 5** (Poster: *Job's Statements of Faith*) and read the first statement on the poster: Job 14:14.

**TRANSITION:** *In the portion of Job's prayer that we examined today, he progressed from questioning despair to expressing his hope for eternal life.*

**HIGHLIGHT:** Emphasize the Key Doctrine (Last Things) on page 26 of the PSG: *The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (1 John 2:28).*

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

**SHARE:** Guide the group to review the bulleted statements under Apply the Text on page 27 of the PSG. Discuss what other insights we can gain as a result of today's session.

**REFLECT:** **How have you responded to God when you have felt despair over your circumstances? How have your responses to difficult situations impacted others?**

**STATE:** *When Christians respond with hope even in the midst of overwhelming circumstances the light of Christ shines through.*

**READ:** Read aloud Job 13:15-16, pointing to **Pack Item 6** (Key Verses: Job 13:15-16) displayed in the room. Note that verse 15 is the memory verse for this week. Then lead the group to reflect on the impact a life lived for God even in the midst of great suffering has on others. Discuss: **With whom can you share this verse this week?**

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, thanking God for His constant presence. Ask Him to help us honor Him in all circumstances. Praise Him for providing a secure future for all who trust in Him.

## OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

### MUSIC

As the group arrives, have the song “Living Hope,” by Phil Wickham, playing in the background. To conclude the session, read aloud each verse, signaling the group to chorally read the chorus at the appropriate time. Play the song again as people leave.

### RELATIONAL/REFLECTIVE

*Gather index cards and pencils.*

Distribute index cards to teams of two to four persons and direct each team to imagine that they were Job. Ask them to discuss and then write on the card a three- or four-sentence diary entry that expresses the despair and hope that Job displayed in these verses. Allow time for each team to share their diary entry as a summary of the session.

### DRAMA

Enlist one person to read Job 14:1-14, portraying Job in his monologue with God. Utilize the same person to read Job 13:15-16 to conclude the session.

### TESTIMONY

Pre-enlist a volunteer to share about a time when they experienced difficult circumstances that stretched their faith. Encourage the person to relate specific Bible verses that encouraged them and actions by others that supported and strengthened them.

### PHYSICAL

Lead the group to respond to the following statements by moving to a specified corner of the room that matches their opinion. Label the corners *agree*, *strongly agree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. After everyone has made their responses, allow time for a representative from the majority decision and a representative from the minority decision to share their thinking on why they made the choice to agree or disagree.

- Hope is fragile in difficult times.
- Silence is seldom practiced during trying circumstances.
- Believers should never display their despair so they don't weaken their testimony to others.
- Friends always offer timely support in times of suffering.

### VISUAL

*Gather paper and markers.*

Distribute paper and markers to each person. Direct the group to draw a large question mark on the paper. Lead the group to record Job's questions as they appear throughout the passage. Encourage each person to turn the paper over and privately record questions they would like to ask God.