



# *Hope Defined*

Believers find hope for life only in God.

## **JOB 14:1-14**

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.

**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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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **JOB 2:11–14:22**

Job 2:11-13 sets the stage for the longest section of the book. After hearing about Job's adversity, three of his friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—came to visit him. Job 3:1–31:40 is the record of Job's dialogue with these men. The theme in these conversations is Job's friends arguing that his suffering was God's judgment on Job because of his sin. Job responded by claiming innocence, that he had done nothing to warrant such discipline.

The first cycle of dialogues between Job and his friends is in Job 3:1–14:22, beginning with Job's lament (3:1-26). In agony, Job expressed his wish that he had never been born. Given this was impossible, Job resigned himself to wanting to die. However, he never expressed thoughts of taking his own life.

In chapters 4–5, Eliphaz rebuked Job for his response to suffering. Eliphaz stated that he had never seen the innocent suffer; only those who committed injustice reaped calamity. Consequently, Eliphaz concluded that Job must have sinned against God. Job responded to Eliphaz by saying that his main reasons for wanting an early death was for relief from his suffering and his desire to stay faithful to God unto the end. What's more, Job said his suffering was multiplied by the disloyalty of his friends. Job was ready to admit his sin against God if they could point out what that sin was (6:1–7:21).

Bildad piled on to what Eliphaz said, saying Job's children deserved to die and that if Job was pure and upright, then he could experience restoration. Bildad argued that God blesses the righteous and causes bad things to happen to the wicked (8:1-22). Zophar called Job a hypocrite for claiming innocence (11:1-20).

In response to this first dialogue with his friends (12:1–14:22), Job stated he knew as much about wisdom as they did. Consequently, if they were unable to contribute to the situation positively, then they should at least keep their mouths shut as the matter was between Job and God. Job concluded with a prayer imploring God to stop persecuting him (13:20–14:22).

**As you read Job 14:1-14 identify words or phrases that point to a lack of hope. Why is it so important for believers to hope in God?**

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## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

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

<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.** <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.**

### **VERSES 1-2**

Job 14:1-14 is a portion of a prayer Job prayed to God that spans 13:20–14:22. In 13:20-28, Job had two requests and several questions. His requests were for God to stop hurting him and to deliver him from the fright he was experiencing. Then Job asked how he had sinned against God. What was the cause of God's wrath against him? Why would God punish him for the sins of his youth? Why did God consider Job an enemy? What possible purpose could God's actions against Job serve?

Next, Job expanded his questioning to how God treats all of humanity. Job turned to the perplexing question of why human life is so brief and miserable. He observed that everyone struggles, suffers, and then dies. It all happens in a short amount of time. Job used two metaphors to make his point. The first was that human life is **like a flower**. The birth of a child is beautiful and accompanied with so much hope and potential. However, soon enough this precious, fragile flower will wither away because of the beating sun of suffering and the hot winds of adversity. The second metaphor bemoans that this child will quickly disappear from the face of the earth **like a shadow** that **does not last**. Life is short of days but full of trouble.

## How does reflecting on the relatively short duration of human life cause a person to consider some of the greater questions of life?

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### VERSES 3-4

These observations concerning the brevity of life and its being full of suffering led Job to ask three questions that puzzled him. It might appear that Job was asking whether or not God even notices what is happening to humanity. In other words, he may have been asking, “God, do you even take notice and care about people’s suffering?” However, this was not his question. His question was that since Job’s life was already brief and full of suffering, why did God add to his pain by treating Job the way He had been treating him? Knowing what he knew about God’s character, Job’s plight perplexed him. If a man is so fragile and oppressed with distress in life, why would God add to his agony?

### *Job’s only hope was for God to do for Job what Job could not do for himself.*

Even though Job insisted he had done nothing to warrant the agonies he was experiencing, he realized he was a sinner. How could Job survive standing before God in **judgment**? Every person is a descendant of Adam and Eve, so everyone has inherited their sin nature. Every person is a sinner by nature and by choice, and therefore born into this world as children already under the wrath of God. Job knew this truth. Everyone is **impure** because of sin, so how could anyone turn one’s impurity into purity? Job recognized it was impossible for anyone to do this for oneself. He had already hinted he wished he had a mediator between him and God (9:33), and now he realized that without someone else to make him pure, he had no hope of standing and surviving before God in judgment. No man can purify himself. Job’s only hope was for God to do for Job what Job could not do for himself. Only God could cleanse Job of his sin and save him.

## VERSES 5-6

Job concluded this part of his prayer by emphatically acknowledging that God sovereignly controls a person's lifespan. A person's days are determined, the length of time an individual lives depends on God, and no human can change or circumvent these divine limits. This truth should give believers peace and hope, because the number of our days on this earth are in God's hands.

However, since God has determined that life is short, Job appealed to God to let people enjoy the brief number of days they have on this earth. He asked God to let him *enjoy* the time he had on earth as he longed for the end of his life *like a hired worker* yearns for the end of a long, hard day of labor.

## DESPAIR (JOB 14:7-12)

**<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.**

## VERSES 7-9

Verses 7-12 contain a contrast and a comparison from nature. Job contrasted the life of a *tree* with the life of a human being. Referring back to verse 5 and the limits God has placed on human lifespans, there is more hope for a tree than there is for a person. If a tree is cut down, it is possible for it to continue living. At times, tender green *shoots* may be seen sprouting from a bare, dry *stump*. In fact, most deciduous trees like oaks, maples, and beeches possess this trait. Some more tenacious trees can sprout repeatedly after having been cut to the ground. This is what allows forests to return after a fire or destructive storm. In time, trees may regrow to the height they once were.

The key words in verse 7 are *hope* and *sprout*. Even after it is cut down, there is hope for the tree to sprout again. There is hope for renewal and new life for a tree even after it appears to be dead. In spite of the fact that a tree is old, its roots are buried deep in the

earth, and its stump is dying, the **scent of water** gives it hope. Just the smallest amount of water is able to make all the difference. Eventually, the life-giving water revitalizes the tree, and signs of life spring forth with new shoots that may grow into a luxuriant tree. There's the probability that the tree will appear as if it had never been cut down in the first place. Therefore, unlike a human being, the tree apparently has no limit on its lifespan.

## VERSE 10

**But a person** marks the sharp contrast between Job's observations of a tree and a human being. The irony is in Job's word choice for *person* in Hebrew. Instead of using the typical words *ish* or *adam*, he used the word *geber*, which is associated with the idea of being "strong" or "might." The irony is that a strong person could lay low a tree with an axe, yet the tree will survive while the person who was able to cut it down will fade away. The strength of every person will be laid low. Job emphasized this truth with the question, **where is he?** Here Job used the Hebrew word *adam*, reminiscent of the first man, Adam, whom God created from dust (Gen. 2:7). When Adam sinned, God said to him: "For you are dust, and you will return to dust" (Gen. 3:19). Thus, Job's question sounded as if he was asking God: Where is this one who has returned to dust? From a human perspective, the rhetorical question's answer is that he is no more.

**How does Job show us the importance of looking at life from God's perspective rather than our own?**

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## VERSES 11-12

Following the contrast in verses 7-10, Job made a comparison taken from nature. He compared people's deaths with a lake and riverbed that have become dry. An example of such a dry lake in the United States is in Death Valley National Park. There, Devil's Golf Course was once a lake that evaporated some 2,000 years ago leaving behind a lifeless 1,000 foot-layer of pointy salt spikes and minerals. The formation of dry lakes and riverbeds was a common phenomenon in the ancient

Near East. In that part of the world, some lakes and riverbeds were permanently dry. They were pictures of death and hopelessness.

From a purely human perspective, Job stated there is no visible evidence that people can hope for life after death. Thankfully, Job's perspective on matters of life and death included God. The very fact that Job brought these matters to God in prayer demonstrates the faith he had in God, even if Job's own perspective was limited. Recognizing his helpless state, Job brought his concerns to the only One who could help him.

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. One must remember that the whole premise of the Book of Job is based on Job having no knowledge of what happened between God and Satan that led up to the events that transpire in the book. Therefore, Job demonstrated that questioning what God is doing and why God does what He does may at times be part of a life of faith.

### **How does keeping our eyes on Christ and His gift of eternal life help us overcome feelings of despair?**

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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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## HOPE (JOB 14:13-14)

**<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.**

### VERSES 13-14

In contrast to the despairing tone of the previous verses, Job recognized there is hope in God. He asked God to hide and protect him in **•Sheol**. In the Old Testament, Sheol is the place where people go when they die. However, instead of Sheol being a permanent place of death, Job saw it as a place to hide temporarily until all that was happening to him was over. Job was ready to die with the hope that God would remember him at that appointed time. (See verse 5.) He hoped that God would not leave him in the grave, but that at an appointed time He would bring Job back.

Job's pinnacle question is in verse 14. It appears Job did not know the answer to this question but asked it of the only One who did. By asking the question, Job attested that there is hope that the Giver of life would revive his life. Job asserted that if he could hope in a resurrection from the dead, then he would wait on God until his **relief** would happen. It is a picture of patient expectation in spite of suffering; Job realized his brief life of suffering would pale in light of an eternity with God. The word *relief* here is the same Hebrew word that is translated "sprout again" in verse 7. Its meaning is often associated with the idea of changing clothes, a concept Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54 to describe the resurrection of the people of God.

**Why is putting one's hope in God the only reliable way to face feelings of despair?**

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### 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).



# APPLY THE TEXT

- Suffering in the world leads the believer to consider the greater questions of life.
- Viewing death as the final state for humans can lead to despair.
- Believers can find hope in God’s promise of life in heaven.

**List some of the questions you have that come about by observing suffering in this world. Spend time sharing your questions with God, asking Him to help you trust Him even in the midst of these questions.**

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**As a group, discuss how death can be a cause of despair. How can you help others deal with this despair based on the truths examined in today’s study?**

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**Memorize Job 13:15. Reflect on the impact a life lived for God even in the midst of great suffering has on others. With whom can you share this verse this week?**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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