

# Redemption Found

Believers can trust God to be faithful to them.

New York's Saratoga National Historical Park contains an unusual statue. It is a stone monument featuring a military commander's single boot. The monument's inscription lauds but does not name the "most brilliant soldier of the Continental Army" who received a severe leg wound at the Battle of Saratoga. The unnamed commander's hard-hitting attack at Saratoga routed the British army and assured an American victory in the battle. That victory helped convince France to enter the Revolutionary War on the side of the American colonies. French support ultimately tipped the scales in the Continental Army's favor, leading to America's long-sought independence.

The boot monument pays tribute to this unnamed colonial soldier's leg wound received while leading a final, victorious charge. So why has this man been denied the mark of respect due a military hero? Why was the commander's name not engraved on the monument that honored his valor? The answer is because the soldier's name was Benedict Arnold, a name that has become synonymous with treason.

By the early summer of 1780, Arnold was a recognized national hero. He held the rank of Major General in the United States Army and had an unrivaled war record. George Washington considered Arnold to be one of his most dependable military leaders and named him the commander of the critical fort at West Point, New York. Regrettably, it was there that a disgruntled Arnold entered into secret negotiations with the British army to surrender the fort. His treachery to the American cause was discovered, however, and Arnold's fall from national hero to despised traitor was quick and sure. He escaped to England, where he added to his treason by leading British forces against the colonial troops he once commanded. He died in England in 1801 at the age of sixty.

Benedict Arnold's treason is an example of the basest form of human failure. Sports annals are full of less disparaging failures. A star quarterback throws a key interception that costs his team the game. A starting pitcher cannot throw strikes in the playoffs preventing his team from making the championship game. The setter knocks the volleyball out of bounds, thereby giving her opponent a win in the match. A point guard misses two

free throws in a one-point loss. But these kinds of failures typically do not permanently alter our lives or destinies.

Nonetheless, in life people fail one another. Sometimes people deliberately act to hurt others, but many other examples of failure are not deliberate. They occur simply because we are human and therefore impacted by human limitations. We misjudge someone, or we misinterpret someone's actions. Such was the case with Job's friends who came to his side to comfort him. Sadly, their attempts to comfort Job turned into accusations, resulting in Job's wondering if he could trust in God to be faithful. In this session, we will be reminded that God can be counted on to be faithful and good even when others fail us.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **JOB 15:1–21:34**

The second cycle of speeches in Job 15:1–21:34 continues the pattern of speaking established in the first cycle. Each of the three friends spoke in the same order as before: first Eliphaz, then Bildad, and finally Zophar. Job's rebuttal speeches followed immediately after each friend's speech.

The first round of the friends' speeches focused on the nature of God. This second round of speeches centers around the idea of the fate of the wicked. As in the preceding cycle, the friends' accusations evoked from Job some brief glimpses of greater faith. But as was the case also in the first cycle, Job followed the glimpses of faith with deep valleys of depression. This adversarial style of dialogue would continue until the Lord finally would intervene to speak (see 38:1–42:6).

In his speech of the second cycle, Eliphaz showed that he completely misunderstood Job's plea for vindication (15:1-35). He no longer showed any sympathy for Job. Instead, he heartlessly accused Job of being foolish. He compared Job's vocal cries of grief to the hot wind that blew in from the Arabian Desert. These blistering winds scorched the landscape, killing all vegetation. Eliphaz felt that Job's cries of grief similarly destroyed Job's credibility. From Eliphaz's perspective, Job's statements suggested that the man lacked a right relationship with God. Job's financial ruin and the loss of his children were evidence of such a conclusion!

After Eliphaz spoke, Job admonished his friends for their failure to comfort him and prayed for relief from his suffering (16:1–17:16). In responding to Eliphaz's accusations, Job expressed a new step of faith in God. He professed

a firm belief that he had an advocate, a “witness ... in heaven” (16:19) who could argue Job’s case before God. The only question was whether his advocate would step up before Job went “the way of no return” (16:22).

In his rebuttal speech, Job frequently alternated between bewilderment about God and frustration with his friends. He desired to find an advocate who was the equal of both God and humanity. He needed someone who could impartially mediate between the two. (It is not until the New Testament that we learn the identity of such a God-Man. He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man.)

Bildad in his second speech accused Job of being egotistical and claimed that tradition proved the fate of the wicked was destruction (18:1-21). Bildad denounced Job for not accepting the wise and benevolent counsel of the three friends. Then he launched into a lengthy tirade regarding the awful death of the wicked. He used the analogies of light and darkness to describe the final end of the wicked. Bildad viewed Job’s situation without any sense of compassion. Instead he concluded the twinkle of life remaining in Job was a last opportunity for the man to acknowledge his sin and repent. Otherwise, Job would die in disgrace and be forgotten forever.

In response to Bildad, Job asserted confidence in his position (19:1-29). He had not sinned against God. Job in fact accused God of abandoning him. But Job’s wild accusation led to another leap of faith. He expressed a conviction that a heavenly Redeemer would vindicate him even though it might not happen until after his death (see 19:25-26). This assertion marks a turning point in Job’s struggle. Job would continue to sink into depression on occasion, but from this point on, more than ever, he was convinced of the validity of his position.

Roused by what he considered an insult, Zophar then attacked Job as the worst kind of sinner (20:1-29). Appealing to human logic, Zophar argued that the wicked die before their time, since sin contains inherent retribution. He proceeded to argue that this would be Job’s fate too, since Job evidently had taken the paths of the wicked and adopted them as his own! According to Zophar, Job had experienced a taste of God’s wrath because Job loved evil. Unless Job repented, God’s burning anger would continue to pursue him in any possible life to come.

In his response to Zophar, Job considered the divine government of the universe and was bewildered by what he saw (21:1-34). He contended that his situation proved the doctrine of retribution was not always applicable. Having abandoned a rigid insistence on the doctrine of retribution, Job began to debate his friends with a new faith in God. He argued that his friends were contradicted by universal experience. Death is the shared experience of all people, whether good or bad. Furthermore, the wicked sometimes prospered

and lived long lives. Similarly, righteous people sometimes suffered and some died before old age. Job declared that he would await further insight from God to resolve his bewilderment over his circumstances. Job's faith in God thus reached a new level of trust.

## EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

### **FAILING FRIENDS** (Job 19:19-22)

Job expressed frustration about his friends and their failure to show compassion and comfort. He went so far as to portray his family and friends as having turned against him. Job appealed to his friends to show kindness to him.

#### **VERSE 19**

**All of my best friends despise me, and those I love have turned against me.**

The death of his children generated intense grief for Job. The loss of his material resources caused emotional stress. The failure of his health diluted Job's mental resolve. Adding to the strain on his capacity to cope with his suffering were the responses of the people around Job (19:13-19). Servants of the once-powerful man now ignored him completely. They refused to answer his summons. Former acquaintances and relatives treated him as an unwelcome stranger in their midst. Even Job's wife shunned him. Combined with his emaciation, discoloration, oozing sores, peeling skin, and other symptoms, Job's foul-smelling breath made him so repulsive that the woman who loved him refused contact of any sort.

Job's close companions likewise turned against him. Verse 19 displays a Hebrew poetic quality known as synonymous parallelism. In synonymous parallelism, the second line repeats the idea of the first line by using synonyms. Hence, the phrase **all of my best friends** ("inward friends," KJV; "intimate friends," ESV; NIV) in the first half of the verse matches the phrase **those I love** in the second half. The words *best friends* denote a set of trusted companions who offer someone reliable confidential advice. The phrase *those I love* emphasizes the dimension of true friendship in which companions genuinely desire and seek one another's well-being above their own (see John 15:12-15). In all likelihood, Job was referring here to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as his *best friends* who now had **turned against** him.

The Hebrew verb rendered **despise** (“abhorred,” KJV; ESV; “detest,” NIV) has the basic meaning of “to loathe” or “to abhor” and implies a sense of rejection and exclusion. In other words, Job sensed that his three former *best friends* had expelled him from their circle of friendship; indeed, they had now become his enemies.

## VERSE 20

**My skin and my flesh cling to my bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth.**

Job could not escape the disgust (to others) that his physical infirmity had spawned. He repeatedly spoke about his nauseating symptoms (2:7-8,12; 7:5,14; 16:16; 30:17). His once-vigorous body now appeared as little more than an emaciated skeleton. The words **I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth** may imply that Job’s gums had maintained some degree of normal appearance. More likely, however, the words comprised an idiom that suggests clinging to something—in this case, life itself—by the thinnest of margins. Job believed that he had barely escaped dying. Combined with the preceding clause describing his bodily appearance, Job 19:20 suggests that Job resembled a corpse. He had to verbally state aloud that he was still alive. Otherwise, people might conclude that he was dead.

## VERSE 21

**Have mercy on me, my friends, have mercy, for God’s hand has struck me.**

Job begged his erstwhile **friends** to **have mercy** on him. He had lost his self-composure and propriety under the divine onslaught. Job’s anguish overrode his dignity in this request for compassion. His twice-uttered plea for *mercy* (“pity,” KJV; NIV) reveals the depth of Job’s despair and the urgency of his entreaty. The Hebrew verb rendered *have mercy* denotes a heartfelt response to someone in need. It implies the person who has mercy on the individual in need can supply that individual’s need. Here, Job’s need was for companionship and compassion. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar could supply that need with encouraging words or gestures. Instead, however, the three friends mercilessly kept blaming Job, insisting that he had brought all of this suffering on himself through hidden sins.

The hands represent appendages with which a person implements decisions and ideas. For example, a sculptor mentally envisions a subject and then uses his or her hands to actually carve that mental picture out of a piece of wood or stone. Hence, hands became symbols of power and a metaphor for putting one’s ideas into practice.

Job readily agreed with his friends that **God's hand** had **struck** ("touched," KJV; ESV). That is, God was the ultimate source of Job's terrible circumstances. We as readers of the Book of Job are aware, of course, that God was the source of Job's suffering only in the sense that He is sovereign over all of creation and had granted Satan temporary and limited permission to test Job's faith. Job, on the other hand, did not yet have this insight. Nevertheless, Job comprehended God's sovereignty and therefore attributed all unforeseen events to God.

## VERSE 22

### **Why do you persecute me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?**

People enduring hardships need others to show compassion to them. Job needed his intimate friends to show him compassion. He had expected them to give him some degree of comfort. Instead they had attacked him and condemned him as the worst possible sinner. Job posed two rhetorical questions to confront his former friends.

In the first question, the verb translated **persecute** comes from a root that describes a hunter pursuing game to kill. The intensive form used here means "to hound mercilessly." Hence, Job perceived that those who could have (and should have) comforted him had instead chosen to relentlessly hound him.

The second rhetorical question may include an idiomatic expression. The idea of chewing on someone's flesh was a way of describing hurtful slander. Job had argued that his friends' allegations of his sinfulness were blatantly false—in other words, slanderous. Job's rhetorical question ("**Will you never get enough of my flesh?**") emphasizes that the friends had constantly inflated their accusations against him. They had not been content to merely say Job was a sinner. They kept on magnifying the accusations against Job, constantly chewing on his pitiable condition and thereby making Job suffer much worse.

---

## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Friend, Friendship" on pages 595–596 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are three or four characteristics of a true friend? When has a true friend helped you in a time of great difficulty?

## LIVING REDEEMER (Job 19:23-27)

Job desired that his words be recorded as a testimony for future generations. He declared his confidence in God, who would ultimately affirm Job's claim of innocence. Job affirmed the reality of life after death, pointing to God's personal presence being seen and experienced.

### VERSE 23

#### **I wish that my words were written down, that they were recorded on a scroll**

Having his **words ... written down** would provide future generations a permanent record of Job's innocence. Again, the poetry in this verse contains synonymous parallelism. The words *written down* are parallel in meaning to **recorded on a scroll**.

Forms of writing were common throughout Mesopotamia and Egypt by the time of Job. In Egypt, a cursive script supplemented the hieroglyphic inscriptions used on monuments and other structures. The climate in Egypt allowed for preservation of documents written on sheets of dried papyrus. In Mesopotamia, where the climate was less tolerant, cuneiform writing was preserved by etching the pictograph letters on soft clay tablets that were then dried and hardened.

The Hebrew word here translated *scroll* ("book," KJV; ESV) probably emphasizes more the fact of documentation than the type of material used. Whether Job wanted his story to be preserved on papyrus, parchment, or clay was of secondary importance; his primary yearning was for a permanent record of the truth about his faith. Job believed that eventually he would be vindicated if only the truth could be preserved. He might not live to see that vindication, but written testimony could lead to the future vindication of his name and reputation.

### VERSE 24

#### **or were inscribed in stone forever by an iron stylus and lead!**

This verse is a continuation of the previous verse. Another medium of ancient writing was engraving on a wax coated wood tablet. Perhaps recollections of this method for recording writing inspired Job to desire a more permanent record. More likely, however, the fragile nature of the documents proposed in the preceding verse motivated Job to propose a more lasting medium. Papyrus and parchment could rot or burn. Clay tablets could be smashed into tiny pieces. Consequently, Job proposed etching his affidavit **in stone forever by an iron stylus and lead**.

Thankfully, Job's yearning for a permanent record came true, although not in the medium he proposed. His words were not engraved in stone, but they came to be inscribed in an even more permanent book: the Scriptures, God's Word. Job's words (and the Lord's words about Job) not only were recorded but also have been translated into many languages and dialects. Countless people have read the Scriptures, learned of Job's faith, and know of his endurance (see Jas. 5:11, for example).

## VERSE 25

### **But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end he will stand on the dust.**

Suddenly, Job took a new step of faith, reaching a remarkable zenith. The embattled sufferer clarified his expectation. The Hebrew word rendered **Redeemer** was a specific technical term with a background in Hebrew family relationships. Job's *Redeemer* must be a near relative who was willing and able to rescue and restore a kinsman in crisis.

Circumstances shaped the responsibility of the kinsman-redeemer in ancient Hebrew society. For example, in the case of a widow without children, the kinsman-redeemer was obligated to take the widow as a wife and hopefully raise children with her in the deceased kinsman's name. In the case of a slain relative, the kinsman-redeemer was responsible to avenge the crime by pursuing and slaying the killer. In all cases, the kinsman-redeemer acted in the best interest of family members who no longer could act for themselves. In the law and historical books of the Old Testament, the concept was primarily commercial or legal. In the prophetic books and the Book of Psalms, the concept acquired more of a theological meaning. That is, the Lord came to be understood as His people's ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer (see Ps. 19:14; Isa. 47:4; Luke 1:68; Gal. 3:13).

Job was certain of the existence of his *Redeemer*. The words **I know** are emphatic. Whether Job's understanding of the *Redeemer* was that of a legal advocate or a divine Intercessor is debated. Job's previous affirmation of a heavenly witness (16:19-20) strongly suggests the latter understanding. The Lord was Job's *Redeemer*. Although Job might not live to see it, he believed that his *Redeemer* **at the end** would **stand on the dust** ("upon the earth," KJV; ESV; "on the earth," NIV).

Today, we who are believers living after the cross and resurrection can say with confidence that Job's *Redeemer* did indeed come to the earth. The living, victorious *Redeemer* is none other than Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. In the end, Jesus Christ will again stand upon the earth at His second coming. He will bring vindication and victory to all who have believed in Him!



## VERSE 26

**Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my flesh.**

Job expressed an even more remarkable conviction that physical death would not prevent him from seeing **God**. Job's conception of what happened after death was admittedly imperfect. He lacked a full understanding of the afterlife. Nevertheless, Job believed that some kind of existence persisted after death. The destruction of his **skin** clearly represented physical death, for Job knew this was what happened to the bodies of deceased human beings.

Yet, Job insisted also that he eventually would stand before God in a bodily form. The phrase **in my flesh** clarifies the conviction that Job would be in a bodily form as opposed to a vague ghostly or spiritual existence. Job's insight at this point foreshadows the New Testament teaching of the bodily resurrection of the dead (see 1 Cor. 15:35-46).

## VERSE 27

**I will see him myself; my eyes will look at him, and not as a stranger. My heart longs within me.**

This perspective of a certain future vindication marked a turning point in Job's attitude. He was convinced that ultimately he would see God personally. Job's own **eyes** would **look at him**. Furthermore, God would no longer appear to be **a stranger** ("not another," KJV; ESV; NIV) to Job. The narrative in Job 1-2 emphasizes that Job was a righteous man who enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. In his present condition, however, Job felt that God was extremely distant from him.

The statement **my heart longs within me** can be literally translated "my kidneys consume my bosom." The kidneys were considered to be the seat of human emotion. Thus, the sense of the phrase seems to be that Job was emotionally consumed by the desire to be restored to his previous relationship with God. This confidence in a living Redeemer prompted Job to warn his friends that their refusal to listen to him would condemn them in God's presence. Time would prove that Job's warning was legitimate (see Job 42:7).

---

## EXPLORE FURTHER

Meditate on Job 19:25-27. What do these verses say to you about redemption? How did (and will) Jesus Christ ultimately fulfill Job's longing for a Redeemer? When have you experienced such a longing?

## WARNING ISSUED (Job 19:28-29)

### VERSE 28

**If you say, “How will we pursue him, since the root of the problem lies with him?”**

The emphasis of Job’s speech makes a dramatic shift with this verse. His focus turns from majestic confidence that he will see God and be vindicated to a grim warning to the friends. Job realized that if God vindicated him, then God must be opposed to the three friends’ words and actions.

The phrase **if you say** attributes Job’s subsequent words—a rhetorical question—to the three friends. The verb translated **pursue** is the same word that is rendered “persecute” in Job 19:22. Indeed, the vocabulary and tone of Job 19:28-29 echoes 19:22. Job perceived that his friends were more interested in forcing Job to repent of surmised sins than encouraging one whom they formerly knew to be “of complete integrity” and “who feared God and turned away from evil” (1:1). The friends could not and would not see any other possibility than that **the root of Job’s problem lay with him.**

### VERSE 29

**then be afraid of the sword, because wrath brings punishment by the sword, so that you may know there is a judgment.**

If Job was innocent, then the friends were guilty of falsely accusing a servant of the Lord. Consequently, the friends, not Job, were in serious danger of God’s judgment. Job warned them to **be afraid of the sword.**

In military parlance, *the sword* could serve as both a defensive and an offensive weapon. Not surprisingly, then, the New Testament writers sometimes used *the sword* as a description of spiritual weaponry. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul identified God’s Word as “the sword of the Spirit,” a key spiritual weapon in the believer’s struggle against the evil spiritual forces of the devil.

Job ended his speech with a sharp warning that unless the friends changed course, they would face God’s **judgment.** Job was eventually proven correct in his warning (see Job 42:7-9).

---

## EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Divine Retribution” on pages 433–434 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. In what ways should believers be motivated by the reality of divine judgment?