

# Job 40:14

## The great challenge God faces us all with

In Genesis the serpent faces humanity with a challenge - to live life successfully on this planet on the strength of knowing good and evil. And without hesitation, Adam and Eve accepted the challenge. And why not? If the fruit off the tree of knowing good and evil made them “like God,” **Genesis 3:5**, surely they’d have all the goodness and wisdom they needed to see them through life **very** successfully, right?

And to a point it was true, **verse 22**, because after they ate the fruit “the Lord God said, ‘The man has **now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.**’” So they really **did** have God-like ability, just as the serpent said. The challenge was on, therefore - humans would have the chance, armed with their God-like knowledge of good and evil, to see what they could make of life.

The Bible, in correct chronological order, places the book of Job next, after the first 11 (some say 22) chapters of Genesis, where - perhaps to our surprise - we find a man who’s doing extremely **well** for himself on the strength of his knowledge of good and evil. It’s even made him “**blameless and upright,**” **Job 1:1**.

He isn’t turned off God, either. Instead, Job “**feared God and shunned evil,**” which shows a man can be a very good man armed with the knowledge of good and evil, despite God’s warning to Adam and Eve not to go that route. Yet here was Job so concerned about being a good man in God’s sight that he’d offer sacrifices on behalf of his children any time they got together for a party, just in case, he says, “**my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts,**” **verse 5**. He was so good that as far as God was concerned, “**There is no one on earth like him,**” **verse 8**.

This must’ve been a kick-in-the-eye for the serpent, because he’d pushed the challenge of knowing good and evil on Adam and Eve as an **alternative** to trusting and obeying God. Yet here was Job gearing his life very conscientiously to trusting and obeying God. Job wasn’t following Satan’s script at all.

So “**One day,**” **verse 6**, “**the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.**” God obviously knew what Satan was up to, however, because he asks Satan right off the bat if he’d thought much about Job lately, and had Satan noticed how wonderfully blameless and upright Job was? Well, yes, Satan obviously **had** been thinking about Job, because he had an immediate come-back in **verse 9**: “Yes, but,” he replies to God, “**Does Job fear God for nothing?**”

Job's being such a goody-goody, Satan argues, because of all those blessings God's been heaping on him. Job isn't a good man at heart, therefore, he's good because it pays him to be good. So, Satan reasons, take away the **incentive** for Job to be good by "stretching out your hand and striking everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face," **verse 11**.

Amazingly, God accepts Satan's challenge, and grants him permission to strike Job, resulting in a firestorm, a hurricane and several raiding parties carrying off all of Job's livestock and killing all his children and all but four of his servants. Job's livelihood and family, all except his wife, are gone.

And what's poor Job's reaction? "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing," **verse 22**. Job stands his ground.

So Satan arranges a second meeting with God and this time claims Job will crack and curse God if Satan is allowed to "strike his flesh and bones," **Job 2:5**. Again God accepts Satan's challenge, and Job is struck with "painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head," **verse 7**. But Job still stands his ground and "did not sin in what he said," **verse 10**, even after his wife has a go at him to curse God.

Job has no idea why this is happening to him, especially when there's no obvious wrong that he's done. For several chapters, then, he protests his innocence and questions God's justice, arguing his defense on the strength of his obedience. Faced with the choice of good and evil, Job has always chosen the good. And if a man's being judged by God on the basis of good and evil, Job believes he's blameless, so he ends his defense with a challenge for God: "I sign now my defense - let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing," **Job 31:35**.

The Almighty **does** answer him, too. For two chapters (38 and 39) God asks Job who he thinks he's talking to, and then in **Job 40:2** he asks, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" "So you think you've got a case against me, do you Job? Well, I've got a case against you too, and you're now going to answer to me." At which point Job wisely replies, "I put my hand over my mouth...I will say no more," **verse 4**.

And now comes a challenge from God to anyone who feels he (or she) has a right to "contend with" or "correct" God on the strength of their own goodness and/or the unfairness of God's actions. And it starts with "Brace yourself like a man," **verse 7**, because this is "gloves off" as far as God is concerned, and **he's** the one now asking questions and demanding answers. "I will question you, and you shall answer me," and Job had better brace himself because this isn't going to be easy to take.

And the first question God asks is, "Would you discredit my justice?" **verse 8**.

How could Job even think of questioning the rightness of God's actions? Did Job think he was more just than God?

And then an even more piercing question: **"Would you condemn me to justify yourself?"** Ah, now there's a question for ALL humanity to answer. Do we find fault with God to make ourselves look good? When we ask questions like, "Why does a loving God allow so much suffering?" is it really just an excuse to reject him? Well, is it or isn't it, God asks? Because, **verse 7: "you shall answer me."**

No wonder God told Job to brace himself, because God's slicing to the bone here. He'd like to know from Job what it is he hopes to prove. Is it to prove himself right and God wrong? Because if that IS what Job's up to, God's up to it too, which he makes clear in this amazing statement in **verse 14: 'Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.'** If Job can prove God's in the wrong, God will admit it.

So how about that for a challenge, humanity? - we've got God on the ropes **IF....**

If what, though? - because let's get this straight: What, exactly, does it take to make God admit we have a case against him? Well, God himself tells us. All it takes, he says, is our answers to the preceding five verses. If we can answer them, God will be the first to admit we're justified in questioning him. So brace ourselves, because here goes....

First question, **verse 9: "Do you have an arm like God's?"** Could Job's arm sling trillions of stars into outer space from a big bang like God's arm did? And compared to God's voice could Job's voice **"thunder like his"**? Because if Job, or anyone else, thinks they've got that kind of power, **"Then adorn yourself with glory and splendour,"** God says in **verse 10, "and clothe yourself in honour and majesty"** - meaning, we can now consider ourselves on the same level as God. We are just as great as he is.

"And if that's how you see yourself, Job," God continues, then **"Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and humble him, (and) crush the wicked where they stand,"** **verses 11-12.** Go on, kill off every evil, Job. Bring world peace. Stop the wicked in their tracks. Create a world with no more tyrants, no more abusers, bullies or conniving fraudsters, and no more evil leaders squirreling away their nations' wealth in their own private bank accounts. Can you do that, Job? Can you **"Bury them all in the dust together (and) shroud their faces in the grave,"** **verse 13?**

Because if we're so clever and so adorned in glory and majesty that we can crush and bury every evil, **"THEN,"** God says, **"I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you."** God will admit that we've got the power to save ourselves. And with that kind of power, then yes, God agrees that we're fully justified in questioning his methods.

“So, have you **got** that kind of power, Job?” God asks, taking into account that Job is “the greatest man among all the people of the East,” **Job 1:3**. So if Job hasn’t got that kind of power, who has?

But that hasn’t stopped humanity from thinking we can succeed on our own strength, has it? Because when things go horribly wrong it’s not our first instinct to admit our weakness, is it? When natural disasters happen we blame God for them by calling them “Acts of God,” but meanwhile we pat **ourselves** on the back by praising a nation’s ability to recover itself and rebuild, by admiring people who stand strong in the face of terrible adversity and suffering, and by making heroes of people who take it on the chin and stoically plough on.

But what does praising our ability and blaming God prove? Absolutely nothing, because evil still exists and we can’t stop it. We can’t even stop the stupidity of building huge cities in earthquake zones. And as disasters pile up and so do the bodies of the innocent, it’s becoming ever more obvious that our own right hand CAN’T save us, but what does it take for us to **see** that, and admit it?

Well, Job finally saw it and admitted it (Job 42:5), but look what it took to **get** him to that point. It took five disasters in quick succession, a lot of ducking and weaving in self-defence and self-justification for 37 chapters, and then a direct interrogation from God.

But it worked. Job got the point. For all his uprightness and blamelessness, and being the greatest man alive, Job could see how powerless he was compared to God. “Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” **Job 42:6**, because he could see he wasn’t like God at all. The serpent was lying. Job hadn’t got anything like the power or majesty of God. And the serpent’s notion that knowing good and evil was all Job needed to see him through life successfully was a lie too, because all it had done for Job was make him think he knew better than God, and that God was wrong. Well, Job was free of all that nonsense at last, having been shown by God it was ludicrous.

But it took a while for Job to grasp it, because he’d created a lovely, secure little world for himself based on his own God-like goodness. And isn’t that exactly what drives our world today, as well? By our own God-given strength and ingenuity we’ve put systems in place that make us think we’re as good and great as God is. There isn’t any problem we can’t solve. We are gods. We are invincible.

And when disasters hit that clearly prove we **aren’t** invincible, we fight tooth and nail against admitting it. Even after a massive earthquake that clearly demonstrates our helplessness against the elements, the cry goes out, “We will stand strong. We will not waver. We will rebuild.” And by interesting coincidence, what was **Job’s** reaction when disaster after terrible disaster hit him? **He** stood strong and did not waver either.

Was that good? No, because all it did to Job was make him say ridiculous things like **Job 13:15**: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.” What a terribly confusing mix of thoughts that is. First he says, “I will hope in God even if he kills me,” but then he says “I’ll be defending myself to his face when I see him.” To begin with, it sounds like a lovely statement of faith in God by Job, but look how quickly it turns into a fiercely self-justifying defence of himself.

But when Job eventually **saw** how ridiculous he’d become, he deeply repented. And isn’t that the hope we have for the whole world too? - that one day people will wake up to the obvious and wonderful fact that we’re nothing like God at all, we can’t save ourselves on the strength of knowing good and evil, and all the serpent was ever after was getting us to justify and defend ourselves against God.

And HOW does God get the world to that point? The same way he got Job to that point. He takes a direct potshot at our gods. Job had made a god of his own goodness, but God shot that to pieces by saying, “Look at you, Job, your goodness not only can’t stop evil, it’s turned **you** into an evil person too, because here you are accusing me.”

And look what God did with the gods of Egypt too, when he rescued Israel. In every one of the 10 plagues, God turned their hallowed gods against them. When he turned the Nile into blood and the fish died, it turned their Nile god, Hapi, lord of the fish and giver of life, into a deadly killer. The stinking piles of rotting frogs made a mockery of their frog-headed goddess, Heqet. The fly-headed god, Khepri, and the locust-headed god, Senehem, took a hit when flies and locusts drove people mad and destroyed their crops. Isis, the great goddess of medicine, was useless against the plague of boils and sores. And so much for the power of Amon-Ra, the sun god, when God struck Egypt with darkness so thick it blocked out the sun entirely. Not only did God make it obvious which gods he was aiming at, he turned their cherished gods into nightmares, too.

Why? To “bring judgement on their gods,” **Exodus 12:12**. It was to show the Egyptians how powerless their gods were compared to him. Their gods weren’t saviours at all. Is it any coincidence, then, that the gods of **our** world are turning into nightmares too? - witness the great earthquake in Japan on March 11, 2011, because the gods of Japan took a major hit that day. The Japanese worship the sacredness of nature and the harmony that exists between the deities, man and nature, but their great, saving Mother Nature turned into their worst nightmare when she came crashing down that day killing thousands of people and destroying their property.

Their sacred Mother Nature took a lot of other Japanese gods down with her, too. Nuclear power stations, the heartbeat of Japan, turned into radioactive killers. National pride and “saving face” turned into a pathetic inability to admit their helplessness. Their hallowed government leaders became hidiers of the truth. Suddenly, their gods weren’t saving them. Instead, their gods were turning against them.

So is that what God is now doing in our world too, exposing the powerlessness of our gods and the stupidity of the idea that our own right hand can save us?

Because if he is, it's great news. Why? Because it works. When we see how weak our gods are, especially when they're turned against us, cracks in our invincibility begin to show, just as they did with Job. Yes, it's horrible having to watch the world suffer, just as it was horrible for Job's friends having to watch him suffer - and it's even worse watching the world curse God instead of repent - but we know from the first two books of the Bible what God is up to.

He's exposing the serpent's lie, that we can live and survive this life (and death) on the strength of knowing good and evil, or on the strength of our goodness (as with Job), or on the strength of our human ingenuity and spirit (as with Japan). He's bringing judgement on all the gods we create.

Why? Because God is our Saviour and a jealous Saviour too, who won't let his beloved humans suffer forever under empty gods that cannot save us. But breaking us away from our gods isn't easy, because we fight tooth and nail to defend them, just as Job did. So brace ourselves - as God told Job - because we're in for a battle.

And I imagine we've all experienced what that battle is like. I know I have. I know of at least 12 gods in my life that I need saving from, because they all have a nasty habit of turning against me, and some of them even turn me against God. All of them became nightmares for me that put me in hospital four times in three years because I thought I was having a heart attack.

Good, because it proves our Saviour's on the job doing what he does best, exposing the folly of all other saviours but him. It must be tough for him having to watch us (and the world) suffer, but with humans this is the way that works. And if anyone knows about that, Jesus does, because **he** went through it too, **Hebrews 5:8** - "[Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.](#)" Obedience to what, though, exactly? Obedience to "[the one who could save him from death,](#)" **verse 7**. There was only one God who could save him from death and from the stress of all that Satan's awful world was throwing at him. It was that God alone, then, that he turned to save him, and no other gods.

Was it easy? No. It involved "[loud cries and tears,](#)" **verse 7**, just as it did for Job - and for the world right now, too. But it works, which is why we Christians can give good reason for the hope we have, because we know there's a plan behind the suffering. And we know what that plan is too, from the book of Job, as to how God exposes the weakness of our gods as saviours, so that one day we trust in the only one who really is our Saviour. So instead of God having to admit it's our right hand that saves us, we're the ones admitting it's only his right hand that saves us. And that's the challenge God faces us all with, to admit **he's** our Saviour and there is no other.