

THE LORD ANSWERED JOB
(An Interpretive Summary in Drama)
by David L. Hatton

THE LORD ANSWERED JOB

STAGE LEFT. Light comes up on ELIHU, dressed in a robe. His head rises slowly from a bowed position. The light increases until he stares ahead at the audience.

ELIHU

“There was once a very wealthy man named Job who worshiped God faithfully and lived a holy life.”

Light dims softly on JOB, and amplified, reverberating background voices fade in.

SATAN

“Yes, yes, I’ve seen the one you’re talking about all right. He’s just one good example of what I was saying. Of course, he’s a willing servant of yours. You’ve surrounded him with blessings on every side. You protect him, his family, everything he owns! Nothing evil ever happens to Job. But just let me have him for awhile. Let me take away all those securities and blessings. Why, he’ll curse you to your face!”

THE LORD

“No, that’s a lie. Job would never do that.”

SATAN

“Prove it! Let me have him. He will curse your name!”

THE LORD

“No, not my servant Job. He trusts me. . . .”

(pause)

“But you’ve accused us both in this. Both his integrity and mine are at stake here. Go ahead, then. Take his blessings. You will see, they are not the reason he serves me and walks in my ways.”

Lights brighten on ELIHU and JOB.

ELIHU

“Tragedy struck Job.”

Lightning flashes in the background with the sound of thunder. White light on JOB changes to yellow then to red as JOB drops to his knees with his hands covering his face. JOB then slumps forward in a sitting position. He moans and rocks back and forth, slowly shaking his head negatively in unbelief.

ELIHU

“He lost all his wealth, and all his possessions. Even his dear children’s lives were taken away in sudden death.”

JOB slowly and solemnly raises his head and hands again. The red light on JOB fades and returns to brightening white light again.

JOB

“You loaned them to me, Lord. . . . Now, you take them all back. What can I do? I praise you. I praise your holy name!”

Light dims on JOB and ELIHU again.

THE LORD

“You see, you snake! Even with all the blessings gone, of his own free will Job praises me. I told you, my favor upon him is not why he serves me.”

SATAN

“Ah! But a human’s real wealth is his health. Let me strike the man’s body, and then see how loyal he is to you.”

THE LORD

(angrily)

“Enough, you unholy viper! Try this vile scheme of yours, too, then. But don’t kill him. You will see, and all eternity will know, that my servant Job loves and serves me purely, despite his suffering at your hand.”

JOB begins to writhe in pain with loud moaning as the lights on him again change from yellow to red. ENTER JOB’S WIFE from STAGE LEFT. Broader lighting on stage.

JOB’S WIFE

“How can you stand any more of this? Look what’s become of us! Our children gone, our years of hard work reduced to nothing! What’s left, but to curse God and die!”

JOB

“Quiet, woman! For God’s sake.”

JOB’S WIFE

“But don’t you see? We’re finished! And look at you now, your body racked with pain. Is this what we get for all our years of serving God? Is this how God treats those who try their best to live right?”

Red light fades out on JOB and white light returns.

JOB

(sitting up straighter)

“Be still! Don’t talk like that! We’ve enjoyed all these many years of God’s blessings.”

(pause)

“I’ve accepted all the good times God sent me and my family. There’s nothing else for me to do. I must also accept the bad times, now that they’ve come.”

EXIT JOB'S WIFE. Lights fade out on JOB and come up again on ELIHU.

ELIHU

“These kinds of catastrophes fill the books of human history, don’t they? You may have undergone similar experiences yourself. Of course, everyone was shocked over the suffering of Job. Three of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to see him, to sympathize with him over his tragic losses and his illness.”

Light comes up on STAGE CENTER where ELIPHAZ, BILDAD, and ZOPHAR are seated at a long table with JOB. The table is turned diagonally with JOB at the far end facing forward. JOB’s face is in his hands as he props up his head with his elbows.

ELIHU

“They sat there silently for quite a long time without saying a word. What can you say to a person who is in such grief and agony as Job was?”

Lights fade out totally on ELIHU.

JOB

(finally looking up, staring out toward the audience.)

“I wish I’d never been born. I should have died as a baby rather than go through this. Why does God let a person continue to live after going through such losses as these? And I don’t even know why this is happening to me. Why couldn’t I just die and get it over with? What a welcome relief death would be right now. But I hang on in constant pain, unable to discover the cause of all this.”

ELIPHAZ

“Listen, Job. I’ve been sitting here quietly for some time, but now I’ve got to speak up. There are some things I just have to say. You know, you’ve often been a counselor to others who were having problems. But now the tables are turned. Now you’re in trouble yourself, and you’re starting to get impatient!

ELIPHAZ (*continues*)

“Don’t you know that you reap what you sow? People get what they deserve in this life. And besides, no one is really pure in God’s eyes anyway. He doesn’t even trust his servants, let alone sinners. If I were you, Job, I’d be seeking God a lot more than you have been. It’s obvious that he’s doing all this to punish you for something.”

(*pause*)

“I mean, well. . . it’s obvious you’ve done something wrong. Just look at all this anger of yours, for instance. You shouldn’t be angry with God for this punishment. Just remember, God is a God of miracles. He’s able to deliver you out of all these painful circumstances, if you keep on praying.”

JOB

“But you don’t understand my suffering! Let God take my life away, even though I’ve kept his words and done his will. I’m too weak to go on through this. And then here you all come, my friends who should be comforting me. Instead, now you’re arguing against my words. But what have I done wrong? Tell me! Death is closing in on me and my life isn’t worth living anymore. Yes, I’m complaining! There’s no comfort for my suffering. I can’t get away from the pain!”

(*pause*)

“Why am I on trial like this, Lord? Why am I being tested? If I’ve sinned against you, why don’t you forgive me?”

BILDAD

“How long do we have to listen to this? We all know that God’s not unjust to people. He wouldn’t have taken your children’s lives if they hadn’t been guilty. They died for their own sins. And if your hands are clean and you seek God, then he will restore your former wealth, plus interest!

“Look to the past, Job. Human experience proves that God never rejected good people. Does history lie? Tradition teaches that God preserves the people who serve him. But he will absolutely wipe out all those who forget him and go astray.”

JOB

“I know, I know all that. But how can a person gain standing with God? God is sovereign and all-powerful. Even though I’m innocent, how could I argue my case with him, especially when he tortures me with so much pain? Though I am a good man, he pronounces me ‘guilty!’ He lets wicked men get off scot-free, while the innocent suffer! And yet, he’s not a man that I can go to court with to argue my case. There’s no umpire between us to settle our disagreement.”

(pause)

“I’m full of bitterness and anger, Lord!

(a weeping moan, then a pause)

“Please, let me know why you’re doing this to me. Is it right to destroy me when you know I’m not guilty? You made me. I’m the work of your hands. You gave me life. But now you’re angry with me, and I don’t know why. . . . My death is approaching, isn’t it? Oh, how I wish you had sent it much sooner. . . .”

ZOPHAR

“Somebody’s got to answer you! I wish God would answer you, Job. I wish he would rebuke you himself. You claim to be innocent, but God’s letting you off lighter than your guilt deserves! You say he’s almighty. But then you claim to be on a level with him. You think you can understand him and talk with him. What you’d better do is to repent and confess your sin, so you can regain his favor. I’m telling you for sure, Job, there’s no escape for a sinner.”

JOB

“You people are so smart!”

(rising to his feet and taking a step back from the table)

“When a good man falls, it’s easy for others to mock him. But the wild animals in the forest have more sense than you. They know that God’s hand is behind all this. He’s wise and powerful. The deceived and the deceiver both belong to him. He does what he likes with men and nations, no matter how great and dignified they seem. Yes, I know all this as well as you do.

JOB (*continues*)

“But I want to talk to him, don’t you see? If you were wise, you would listen to me and stop trying to defend him with your empty pat answers! I realize how dangerous it is to talk this way, but he’s my only hope. Sinners can’t stand in his presence, can they? That’s how I know he would set me free if I presented my own case to him.”

(pausing, stepping forward, and looking upward)

“O Lord, I’m covered up with pain and fear, but please, come and let’s talk together. Show me where I’ve sinned. Don’t hide your love and friendship from me. You persecute me for the mistakes of my childhood. And cause me to waste away in the shadow of death. And is there any hope left in death itself? If only I could hide in the grave until your anger with me passes. Then you would remember your love for me and call me back to life. Even now my sin is secretly hidden away with you. I don’t understand it. All I know is that my hope is vanishing in pain and sorrow. . . .”

ELIPHAZ

(rising up from the table)

“These useless words of yours not only demonstrate your guilt, but lead others astray as well! Who do you think you are to say such things against God? If no one is pure in his sight, then how can mockers like yourself stand before him? History shows that people like that end up writhing in pain and starving to death in darkness. They lose all they own in the terror of violence. Their life dries up like a weed.”

JOB

“I’ve heard all that before! How consoling you friends are! Would I speak like that against you, if you were in my shoes? No, I’d try to encourage you and ease your pain with gentle words. What else can I do but talk like this? God has smashed my life to pieces and covered my face with tears, even though I have been devoted to him. Both heaven and earth are witnesses to my innocence, yet you scoff while I weep to him. I long to plead my case with him, but I’m crushed. My spirit is broken and I’m ready to disappear into darkness. My plans and desires have come to a miserable end. Only the grave awaits me now, but will I find any hope there?”

BILDAD

(rising from the table)

“What good are your angry words? You claim to be right while everyone else is wrong. No wonder your light is going out! You’ve set a trap of fear and now you’re caught in it. You’re starving with disease and your wealth has been justly snatched away. Nobody will remember your name, unless it’s out of horror. People will shudder, because things like this happen only to those who don’t care about the knowledge of God.”

JOB

“How long? How long will you wrongly accuse me, as God wrongly torments me? I cry out in vain for help, while injustices keep piling up to haunt me. God treats me like his enemy. He causes neighbors and relatives to scorn me. All those I love despise me. And even you, my friends, fail to pity me. Instead, you persecute me, as God does. If only the truth were known!”

(pause)

“And yet, somehow I know that I have a Redeemer who will someday stand up for me. Then I will see God for myself. I tremble at that thought, and so should you who insult me. There’s going to be a future judgment someday!”

ZOPHAR

(rising from the table)

“I don’t care what you say! Everybody knows that people can’t get away with their sin. Oh, they enjoy it for a while, but finally God destroys them. There’s no way out of it, once God’s decided to punish you.”

JOB

“That’s my main complaint. That’s what scares me most, because I don’t see wicked people suffering as you say. The wicked person mocks God and God doesn’t do anything about it. But who can teach the Judge of all creation to do differently? We all go to a common grave, but sometimes the wicked die content while the righteous die in misery. So, your arguments are false.”

ELIPHAZ

(coming closer to JOB)

“But suppose you were righteous, as you claim. Do you think that benefits God in any way? But that’s clearly not the case here. He’s not judging you for your good life. It’s evident that you have sinned terribly. Don’t think that he’s a blind Judge, just because he’s so far away. I plead with you, Job! Make your peace with him and reverence his words. Seek him in repentance, and he will restore you. He will hear your prayers again. You may even help rescue other sinners by your own good standing with him.”

JOB

“But why can’t I stand before him today? Then I could reason with him, and I know he would listen to me. Even if I don’t have that opportunity, still I know I’ll pass this test with success, because I have obeyed him and have always held fast to his ways. In his sovereign majesty he has done this to me. And yes, I tremble in awe before him. But his silence does not silence me! I must know why he lets the unjust person go unpunished while the innocent suffer at the hands of the wicked. These are valid questions!”

BILDAD

“You’re just a worm, a maggot in his sight! How can you imagine yourself righteous before the great and mighty God of the universe? Nothing is pure before his great holiness!”

JOB

(sarcastically)

“You’ve all been a great help! Such encouraging words!”

JOB moves forward more to FRONT STAGE. ELIPHAZ, BILDAD, and ZOPHAR turn away slowly as if to leave together, but they turn about as JOB speaks again.

JOB

“Indeed, God’s mastery over earth, sky, and sea displays his sovereign power. But creation speaks just barely about him, not enough to know him fully.”

(turning more towards ELIPHAZ, BILDAD, and ZOPHAR)

JOB (*continues*)

“No, your words are not true! My lips are clean and my conscience is clear. Your arguments won’t make me deny my own integrity! And how will you yourselves do under his wrath? Will you seek him in prayer when calamity befalls you as it has me? Don’t you see, I could tell you what we all know is true. Yes, the wicked will *not* prosper in the end. God will not let the wicked go unpunished!”

(pause, turning more toward the audience)

“But I do seek wisdom, and I realize we can’t find it on our own. Only God can teach it to us, and he has, when he told us to worship him and live a holy life. In the past I tried to live that way, and God was my friend. He blessed my household and watched over me with tender care. I was a man of prestige in the city. I helped the poor and saved the oppressed from injustice. I had confidence in life, and my advice was always sought after by everyone. But now even the riffraff around town mock me, and I’m the object of everyone’s jokes. My agony is unbearable!”

(falling to his knees and looking up with hands folded)

“O Lord, I’ve cried for help and you’ve ignored me! You’ve treated me with cruelty. My life is almost dissolved in death. My heart was always grieved when I heard the cry of the poor and needy. But now in my own distress, I weep without relief or comfort! My body burns with pain!”

(pausing, leaning forward sadly)

“My former joy has vanished entirely. . . . My days of happiness have now become a hopeless sobbing.”

(pausing, looking up)

“But I kept my life pure, in the fear of God. I was honest in all my relationships. I was faithful to my wife. I treated my employees fairly. I gave charitably to every poor person I met. I didn’t trust in my wealth or worship false gods. I never cursed my enemies or failed to show anyone hospitality. I’m not hiding anything because I fear what men think. If there’s a warrant out for my arrest, I’ll sign it myself! I’ll wear it as a badge of honor as I march boldly into God’s courtroom. Only, let the Almighty Lord answer my questions!”

(pause, then slowly and tearfully)

“I never overworked the land. I never exploited others in any way.”

JOB (*continues*)

(*bowing down very low*)

“What more can I say?”

Light up on ELIHU again STAGE LEFT.

ELIHU

“Now, I overheard all this. I admit, I was perturbed at Job for thinking his judgment was better than God’s. But I was also upset with his three friends, because they condemned Job without really answering him. Since I was a young man, I waited for them to finish talking. But the Spirit of God stirred me up so that I had to speak my own mind on these issues.”

ELIHU moves over near to JOB.

ELIHU

“Job, please, listen. I’m just a man like yourself. You don’t need to worry about me being hard on you. But you’ve said some things that aren’t correct. God is God. Should you complain that he doesn’t give you an account of his activities? God speaks to people in dreams and visions. And yes, he even speaks in the pains of sickness. His purpose is not to destroy but to save. God provides sinners with a Mediator to teach them the way of truth. He wants them to seek pardon from him. That’s the way God is, Job. He desires our salvation. So, listen to me now. I want to see you set straight. I want to correct some of the things you’ve said. You know, you’ve spoken like a sinner does. You’ve misrepresented the Almighty.

“God never sins. He never perverts justice in any of his sovereign works. And he’s impartial. He doesn’t play favorites. He knows everybody’s deeds, good and bad alike, and he will surely punish wickedness. It’s true, Job, you must gain an attitude of repentance. But it can’t be based on your own ideas and misconceptions. Instead of maligning God’s justice with your words, you need to come to the Lord your Maker humbly. No wonder he doesn’t answer when you approach him so proudly and say foolish things about him. Yet, he’s not only just but merciful. He goes a long way in offering sinners the opportunity for correction and forgiveness. But they’ve got to be willing to turn from their foolishness and follow him. Otherwise, sinners are doomed to go on suffering the consequences of their sin right into their graves.

ELIHU (*continues*)

“Don’t let your pains turn you into a bitter pessimist, Job. Bitterness will end up making you forget about God’s sovereignty and wisdom. God is infinite and we are finite. How thoroughly can we know the almighty Lord of heaven and earth? His magnificent works have exalted his majesty far above our comprehension. I get excited just talking about the marvels of his creation. The forces of nature obey his every command, whether he decides to use them for punishment or for merciful providence.

“Listen, Job, and consider his works. Can you be his assistant in managing the wonders of his universe? If so, then teach me how I should address my own case to him. Why, I myself would evaporate before him the minute I opened my mouth! The Almighty is awesome, Job! The highest magnitude of exaltation we can imagine doesn’t come close to touching his greatness. He will never violate justice or righteousness. So, fear him, Job! Fear the Lord, and stop taking yourself so seriously.”

The sound of thunder and flashes of lightning cause all five men to look about in fear and trembling. The sound of a high-pitched wind blasts in the background. Lights go dim on all but JOB, who, with a shocked look on his face, stares upward in the direction of the light that brightens on him.

THE LORD

(with a booming, reverberating voice)

“Who are you, that you boldly cast suspicion on my plans just because you don’t fully understand why I do certain things? You wanted a confrontation. All right then, arm yourself with your best arguments and stand here like a warrior. Your desire is granted. We are going to talk. But this time, let me ask you “why,” so that you can instruct me about the complexities of life.”

JOB stands slowly.

THE LORD

“Let’s start by your telling me how it all began. Surely you can explain to me the basics of creation. But maybe I’m underestimating your knowledge. Perhaps instead of explaining the existence of your planet, I should have you demonstrate your ability to govern the forces of nature. Start with the laws of physics, or show me how to control the weather.

THE LORD (*continues*)

“Better yet, why not show how well you’ve mastered the complex rhythms of ecology in the world of living things. Or if that’s a little too much, then how about expounding your knowledge of just a few of my wild pets. Tell me about the mountain goat, the ostrich, or the eagle. Don’t just explain their dynamically interwoven instincts, but tame them and train them to do your work for you, my dear teacher.

“You’ve found fault with me in areas of my all-powerful rule of the universe. Since you’ve reproved me on issues of highest importance, then surely you can answer the simplest matters that I have to deal with daily.”

JOB

(*haltingly*)

“Even my knowledge of these things is insignificant. Who am I that I can reply? No, I’ll shut up and listen. I’ve said too much already.”

JOB bows very low and starts to get down on his knees.

THE LORD

“Don’t sit down yet, brave one! I’ve still got some questions for you. You’ve focused so much on your own lack of understanding that from your perspective I’ve been unjust. You’ve stated this publicly! But can you see things from my point of view? Wield my power for a while. Sit on the throne of the universe, and handle the intricate task of meting out justice to all mankind, great and small. Then your complaint will carry weight.

“But you might as well teach me about the strength of my sea monsters or try to wrestle with my fire-breathing dragons. Contend with a dragon once, and if you survive, you’ll not try it again. But if you’re afraid to arouse a dragon, then why do you dare to challenge me? Do I owe you or anyone else an account of how I manage the coordination of history? Conquer the dragon first, and he will be more than happy to answer all your questions for you.”

JOB

“Lord, I acknowledge that you are supreme in wisdom and power. None of your purposes and plans can be improved upon by men like myself. I spoke boldly, but I know so little. I’ve foolishly argued about what I didn’t even understand. The awesome responsibility you have of ruling over the events of life is too much for my limited comprehension. You graciously answered my request for a hearing in your presence. Yet I had become preoccupied with discussions of theology and ethics. So I repent. I confess again my former trust in you, Lord. Now I see more clearly than ever the kind of Person you really are.”

THE LORD

“Now that’s faith! Faith expressed in words like those is what really makes me happy. And you’ve said all that without understanding what’s been happening to you.

“But you three fellows. . . .”

Light comes up on ELIPHAZ, BILDAD, and ZOPHAR who have slowly been cringing away from table. They turn and look at one another in fear.

THE LORD

“You three come over here.”

(They approach JOB)

“Your unwelcome words about me were all wrong. None of you has spoken about me the way Job has. Yet you condemned my servant Job. He was expecting all along that I would answer him. He showed his trust, while you talked on and on about things you don’t even understand. Now, before I make you answer for your own foolishness, ask Job to pray for all of you. Job really has faith in me. I’ll listen to his prayer and spare you. Otherwise, you three are in for it!”

ELIPHAZ, BILDAD, and ZOPHAR gather and kneel around JOB who raises his hands upward. He then places his hands on the heads of each of the friends and raises his hands upward again as the light dims on all of them. Light brightens on ELIHU.

ELIHU

“So the three friends asked Job to pray, and when Job prayed for them, his own body was healed. His relatives and neighbors began to hold him in higher esteem than ever. He became more prosperous in business than before his troubles began. His wife gave birth to the same number of children that he had previously. And Job’s three daughters. . . they were the fairest in all the land. Job lived to see his grandchildren. Finally, he died in peace, an old man who was wise and rich in the experiences of this life.”

Lights fade slowly on them all. The end.

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