

THE BOOK OF JOB



William Blake Illustration for the Book of Job



The Book of Job

Probably began as an oral tradition. A story told or sung. It is believed that a written version appeared around 700BC.

The evidence within the story describes conditions that compare with the time of Abraham. Adding the years before the story begins and years for the new family to grow to four generations, Job would have been well over 200 years old. Some scholars have suggested it describes the world that existed before the flood. If so, it would have to be well before the days of Noah! He and his family were the last godly people around.

Characters

God – ELOHIM [a plural word]

The oldest recorded title of God in the Bible [See Genesis ch.1 verse 1]

Job – his name came to mean 'persecuted' – The Hebrew root word has the idea of returning – this relates to the amazing 'comeback' Job experienced after all the trials.

Job's Wife

Satan

Three Friends

Eliphaz

Bildad

Zophar

A Young Man

Elihu

THE STORY

Theme: God's Purposes worked out in human lives

Job is selected as God's champion against the accusations of Satan that God 'looks after His own' and is therefore unfair and unjust! The malicious intent of Satan to destroy Job emphasises the fact that the human world was in Satan's grip [see Hebrews 2:14,15]. We also see in the story the fact that God cannot deny Who He is. He keeps His Word even though it would seem to us (and Job) that He is letting us down. Help in understanding this can be found in Luke ch.22 verses 31 and 32.

The story progresses through dreadful experiences and suffering and ends with God intervening and bringing justice and making sense of the whole thing.

Structure

Events in Heaven and Earth

- Satan accuses God of favouritism

- The result is an attack on Job's family and property

- A second conversation in Heaven leaves Job hanging on to life by the skin of his teeth

Conversations on Earth

- The longest part of the Book*

- The three friends and Job try to make sense of what has happened

- The arguments reflect human thinking about faith in God

- Elihu enters the arguments and challenges all four older men about their endless words.

- God intervenes and brings a challenge about human limits of understanding

God brings justice for Job

- Restoration and Blessing

What Is The Point?

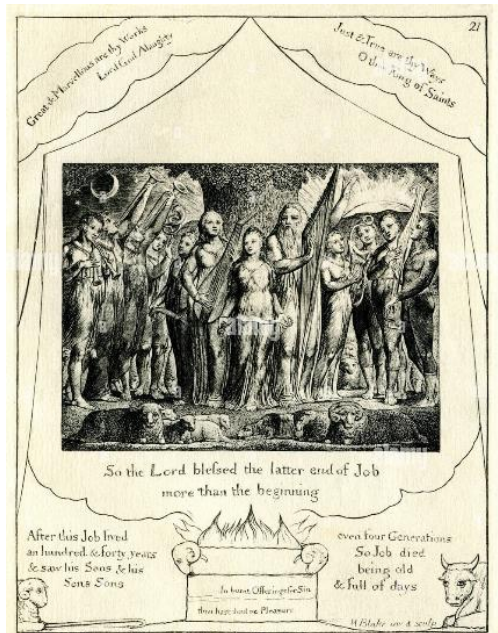
God purposed that this Book should be in our Bibles. It works on several levels. Some like to use the Book to explain the problem of pain and suffering. Others emphasise the Sovereignty of God. It can be used to uncover the weaknesses of some religious argument about sin and suffering. It can be used to explain the spiritual battle in the heavenlies and be placed alongside Bible prophecy and allegory. It is all of these things and more.

The Book of Job is a song, a poem. It is placed with the Books of Wisdom. It is a true account from God about our human predicament of sin and death. People who read it without the baggage of Biblical criticism or scholarship, find help, comfort and wisdom from the Holy Spirit. After all, we are all "born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." Job 5:7 NIV

The name Job has a two-sided meaning . It refers to suffering [persecuted as an enemy] and it refers to salvation [one who returns]. He was knocked down but he bounced back.

... for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity. Proverbs 24:16 NIV

The point of the book is how it ends not how it begins.



The Friends

Job's friends were deeply upset by Job's predicament. They visited him and sat quietly with him. It is a pity they didn't stay that way. Job tried to express his grief. His children dead, his wealth and health gone. He cries out that he wishes he had never been born. He goes further and says:

What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. (26) I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." (Job 3:25-26 NIV)

And so, the three friends pile into him, accusing, criticising and correcting. They seem to think that Job was asking them to explain why he was suffering. That is a big human mistake. We all try to give answers where there are none other than what God gives. Too much of religion and Christianity comes from human explanations and ideas. The comments of the three friends encapsulate much of the false thinking of religion.

ELIPHAZ – like a careful but judgemental believer

"Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? (Job 4:7 NIV)

He is not suggesting that a godly person is never in trouble. He is challenging Job about his grief and lack of faith and hope in God. Eliphaz claims a spiritual right to quote his opinions as God's Word!

"A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice: "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? (Job 4:12-17 NIV)

He claims a kind of special authority to be Job's teacher and director in his pain and anguish. He accuses Job of challenging God and claiming that he did not deserve to be so harshly treated.

"Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. (Job 5:17 NIV)

So it goes on. We are not perfect and God has every right and reason to discipline us. This is quoted in Hebrews 12 v.5, with the encouragement to hold on to hope in God. Eliphaz brings numerous thoughts that are echoed in the New Testament – good thoughts. However, he used these to judge and condemn Job.

Later in the story Eliphaz unleashes this judgemental attitude.

What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have? The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father. Are God's consolations not enough for you, words spoken gently to you? (Job 15:9-11 NIV)

He believes that he has been gentle with Job and understanding of Job's predicament. However, he has been cold and harsh. He accused Job of wicked behaviour. He has brought truth but without love. He has hurt Job not healed him. He has used truth as a bludgeon without the wisdom his years should have brought him. Life can bring some very upsetting things. Some happen because we are human and live in a sinful world. They are not a direct consequence of sin or unbelief. God deals with us with grace and compassion. This was not the way of 'spiritual' Eliphaz.

Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you. (Job 15:6 NIV)

He concludes that Job has never feared God.

BILDAD – like a Pharisee or legalistic believer

Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. (Job 8:3-6 NIV)

Job complained about what has happened to him and his family. Bildad comes up with the reason. Job and his children had sinned. His argument can be summed up in the saying, "There is no smoke without a fire". This kind of argument often occurs in a Christian context. Even though the Lord Jesus told us not to judge others (meaning condemn them, decide their punishment, decide their motives). In Romans chapter 2, Paul wrote about the danger of judging people when, after all, we do the same things, commit the same sins as those we are judging.

... you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? (Romans 2:21 NIV)

It is easy to use arguments against someone else who appears to be experiencing hard times:

"Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers. (Job 8:20 NIV)

Job felt rejected and alone. Bildad does not help him by telling him that he needs to repent. Or concluding that he is not blameless but seriously at fault.

"When will you end these speeches? Be sensible, and then we can talk. (Job 18:2 NIV)

Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who knows not God." (Job 18:21 NIV)

So, Bildad had decided that Job is being punished because he does not know God.

ZOPHAR- like a super-spiritual believer

If you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. (Job 11:14-16 NIV)

Zophar goes further than the previous two 'friends', he accuses Job of wilful sin and that God is punishing him. The statement is fair – if he was speaking with an enemy, a godless man. He is not merely saying that it looks like Job was suffering for his sins, he is accusing Job directly of sin. The fact is the three men knew Job. They knew His life, his character. Yet, in his time of trouble they conclude that Job is suffering from secret faults and sins.

Sometimes a Christian will do this. They can 'knock a man down when he is already nearly out for the count'. Jesus told us to be merciful. There is no blessing in quoting Scripture at people without wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The sentiments are okay but not much use. It is a bit like proclaiming the Gospel without compassion, without remembering our former lives. Zophar speaks as though he is an expert and Job a mere novice about life. Maybe our present suffering will go away, like "water under a bridge", but such words do not help in the middle of a storm.

I hear a rebuke that dishonours me, and my understanding inspires me to reply. (Job 20:3 NIV)

Zophar appears to have felt some challenge back at him about his self-righteousness.

However, he concludes that Job was never a true believer.

This is a simple summary from the words of the three friends. Each man takes a judgemental standpoint and is unable to see that there is more going on in the spiritual world than their small minds could understand. They may have been trying to help but each ends up frustrated that Job holds on to his integrity and refuses their advice to get right with God so that the trouble will flee away.

There are many things the three say that can be applied to Christian truth and experience. But we need to be careful how we use the Word of God – it is a two-edged sword. It needs humble personal application before we use it to advise someone else. Their arguments are based on nature and experience and their idea is that a good person has wealth, and blessing, and does not experience hard times. Their responses to Job show deep misunderstandings of God, but Job's arguments with them were provocative and they found it difficult to control their answers.

JOB – like a true believer when things go badly wrong

Then Job replied: "I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing?" (Job 16:1-3 NIV)

This response comes half-way through the book. Job needed to talk, he needed to protest, he was hurting and couldn't understand what was happening to him, why the God he served would let this happen. Listening to his friends tell him stuff he already knew did not help. Job had similar views and realised that they were not helpful – there had to be a better answer.

Job's wife was no help!

His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9 NIV)

That must have been really hard to hear. From someone he loved.

Job wishes he had never been born. He can't see the point of living and being successful if it can be lost so easily and without any purpose he can understand. He says many things in his distress.

.... "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (Job 1:21 NIV)

Blessed be the Name of the Lord! Job submits to all the dreadful things happening around him and gives honour to God. But why has God done this to him?

What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." (Job 3:25-26 NIV)

What does Job mean? More than three millennia ago people had the same anxieties as now. The more wealth the more worry! Even with faith in God he was worried things could go pear-shaped. He was aware of human sin and trouble. He felt uneasy about things. The modern world intrudes on our peace and quiet and makes us feel uneasy. Is there an answer – indeed there is – when we find our minds fixed on God's grace and purposes and keep a light hand on the things of this world.

Do I have any power to help myself, now that success has been driven from me? (Job 6:13 NIV)

Job can see no way out but death. So he suggests that God should complete what He is doing. The things Job relied on for confidence have all gone. He feels rejected by God, his wife and his friends.

Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind? (Job 6:26 NIV)

Job's complaints circle around the facts of human weakness and the fact that he has done his best to live a righteous life. He maintains his integrity.

If only there were someone to arbitrate [mediate] between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. (Job 9:33-34 NIV)

And further on in the discourse he says this:

Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend. (Job 16:19-21 NIV)

He does not claim to be sinless but he appeals to God that he has sought to be blameless. He realises that only an acceptable mediator could represent him before God. We have the blessing of knowing that the mediator and friend is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Job accepts what Eliphaz has said about sin:

"What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? (Job 15:14 NIV)

Yet Job claims that what God has allowed in his life was unfair - he has been careful to honour God – more perhaps than his friends.

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1 NIV)
For you write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth. (Job 13:26 NIV)

Job argued with himself as much as with God, or his friends. Suffering and rejection are hard to understand. Sometimes we can see that our actions will have brought consequences. Other times the consequences seem unfair and harsh. Which of us would see an earthquake as justice for our sins?

Job holds on to his integrity, his faith in a just and merciful God.

Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:23-27 NIV)

ELIHU – a young enthusiastic believer

A fifth person interrupts the argument.

But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God. He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. (Job 32:2-3 NIV)

Elihu challenges Job for justifying himself and the three friends for failing to show that Job was in the wrong. He begins with a degree of humility but grows bolder as his discourse progresses.

But you have said in my hearing— I heard the very words—"I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. (Job 33:8-10 NIV)

Elihu is young and zealous. He simplifies and misquotes what has been said. He suggests that all the men have spoken from the idea that human effort can cut the mustard with God. Job, he claims, claimed to be sinless and God unjust for allowing him to suffer. On the other hand he describes God as disinterested in what Job was going through. As though it did not matter to God.

All three friends accuse Job, on different levels, of sinning, being wicked and hypocritical. They knew him and assumed these things on the basis of what God had allowed Job to suffer. The suffering proved that Job had been fooling them all along. Elihu describes Job as a rebel.

Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.' Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost for answering like a wicked man! To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God." (Job 34:35-37 NIV)

Elihu's main thrust seems to be that God is so far above us that nothing we do makes any difference to Him. We cannot influence Him by our claims of righteous living. God does as he likes and it includes bad people getting their just desserts. He suggests that God cannot be not moved by Job's

appeals for help and justice. At the same time he claims that righteous people receive rewards and sinners receive punishment.

Elihu continued: "Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said in God's behalf. I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you. "God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. (Job 36:1-5 NIV)

The humility seems to have disappeared in a rush of inspiration. He speaks up for God. May I point out here that we are not asked to defend God. Certainly, the last part of his discourse has similarities with what God says to Job.

Some scholars equate Elihu with Jesus. So, the things he says can be heard as from the Lord Himself. I find that difficult to accept. Elihu does not add anything to the previous arguments. He does make a greater distinction between God and humans. God is Sovereign in everything.

He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge. (Job 36:10-12 NIV)

Job had been prosperous but God took it all away because Job was a sinner. Like the others, Elihu seemed unable to see that wealth and sin could go hand in hand. He fails to see the possible fall-out from God this could have for him for making an unfounded judgement on Job.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:1-5 NIV)

Jesus points to the need for all to repent of their sins. There is no yardstick of wealth that we can use to decide who needs to repent.

... *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23 NIV)*

GOD (ELOHIM) SPEAKS

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? (Job 38:1-2 NIV)

While Elihu has been talking a storm has been raging! Who is God interrupting? Who is making things hard to understand through empty words? God's words echo something Elihu said at the beginning of his speech (Job 34:35-37) . Could it be that God is using those words as a challenge? Truly, all five men could be challenged about this. Only Job recognises that he was guilty of making it difficult to recognise God's ways. Christians need care about saying things to 'help God out'! God intervenes and clears the air – removes the foggy thinking.

All five men had been trying to get through to the others their points of view. They thought that God could not get the message across without them. We have experiences in our lives and in speaking with others that make us wonder if people can hear God. This is not a reason for us to speak for God or add to the weight of God's Word. Sin will be found out and God's Word will be there in the heart so that no one will have an excuse. All hear, some listen and believe.

God's words challenge the five men about what they see around them in Creation. Their knowledge is limited and they have no power over it.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. (Job 38:4 NIV)

"Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? (Job 40:8 NIV)

God speaks with the five men, particularly with Job. There are similarities with things that Elihu said. There is a marked difference – God does not condemn Job. God does not tear him apart by misrepresenting his words. Instead God speaks about His power and the glory of His Creation. The speech resembles a modern documentary film about our natural world, about the wonders of the universe. God does challenge the fact that each of the men had justified themselves rather than give glory to God and His justice.

Now, Elihu does point to the justice of God but tends to the idea that only wicked people have bad things happen to them.

I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. (Job 36:3 NIV)

But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you. (Job 36:17 NIV)

Elihu is different than the other three. He speaks from faith that cannot work out why Job does not simply humble himself before Almighty God. He concludes that Job must be just like the pagans and sinners who get their judgement – eventually. Some modern Christians teach that suffering is a result of sin in a fellow Christian. And, indeed, sometimes it can be. The problem lies in the human tendency to judge and condemn others while excusing themselves.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5 NIV)

The judgements of Job's 'comforters' was premature and not based on any facts it was conjecture, presumption based on inadequate information. God knew Job, through and through, yet made no allusion to his sins. God did not condemn him – His words were correction and redirection of Job's thinking.

THE CONCLUSION

You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. (Job 42:3 NIV)

Job is repentant. He has spoken about things that are beyond human explanation. He gives God all the Glory. Knowing what he had been through, one might at last understand this Scripture:

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (James 5:11 NIV)

The modern obsession with healing and health has distorted our thinking about how God works. Christians fill auditoriums in the hope of healing of all manner of ailments. Preachers make millions out of this and most seekers remain sick! Jesus was the Messiah for Israel and fulfilled the promise about bringing healing and restoration to the people. It is evident in Acts and the Epistles that Christians suffered and even died – through persecution and through sickness. We are told to anoint with oil and pray. We are told that when sickness is because of sin it will be revealed and confessed. Prayers of faith bring healing. The context is the church and the fellowship of local believers.

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. (Job 42:7 NIV)

Note that Elihu is not included in this anger and judgement. These three men should have known better and not distorted the truth to suit their own thinking. We need to keep this in mind when Government and social pressure dictate what Christians should believe and teach.

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. (Job 42:10 NIV)

Job is healed, restored, forgiven and gladly offers prayer and sacrifice for his friends. Sacrifice? This is around 2,000 years before Jesus died on the Cross. Sacrifices were the picture language for faithful people that God would do away with their sins through the death of Messiah – the One Who was to appear on earth – Saviour and Redeemer.

Carefully read this closing chapter. Job received twice as much as what he had before. But look! He had a new family but only the same number of children as before.

And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. (Job 42:13-14 NIV)

NB. The three daughters are mentioned by name.

Read Chapter One again. Here is an excerpt:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. (Job 1:1-3 NIV)

Job offered sacrifices for His children. He prayed for them. He taught them about the need to honour God and keep from sinning against Him. Not one was lost so there was no need for twice as many children! This is echoed in the words of our Lord Jesus:

This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." (John 18:9 NIV)

Our lives are more than physical bodies and earthly experiences. The book of Job reveals the truth of eternal life. We can have the hope of heaven because, like Job, we can trust in Jesus our redeemer and our friend.

EPILOGUE

This ancient story deals with the ageless question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In the Book of Job everything resolves in the great blessing and honour Job receives for his endurance and enduring faith in trial. He was not rebuked for holding on to his trust in God and in his integrity against all the condemnation. He was rebuked for giving the impression that God was not just and fair in what he had allowed in Job's life.

The first part of the story makes some sense of why Job suffered and hints at a spiritual battle going on in the heavenlies. Usually the Scriptures describe something livelier than a debate about God being biased towards the faithful!

The whole story makes sense when looked at through the Person of Jesus Christ.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: (1 Peter 3:18 KJV)

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Hebrews 2:10 NIV)

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3 NIV)

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, suffered through his life and death. He did not suffer because of personal fault or sin. He did not sin. He suffered and died on the cross for sinners. Even though He was without sin, He identified fully with the human predicament of suffering and pain. In doing this He won a victory on our behalf and paved the way to eternal life for human beings even though ruined by sin. Through Jesus Christ we do not merely receive a repair job, we are renewed and can look forward to

glorified bodies in heaven. We will be made like Jesus in His wonderful resurrection life.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23 NIV)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV)

However, trouble, sorrow and suffering continue to be the experience of human life. True believers understand this and recognise the opportunity they give to grow more like Jesus and show mercy and understanding towards those in trouble. We are not those who jump to conclusions or judge people as sinners. Even when sin has caused trouble for someone, we show mercy and concern to help them be restored.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1 NIV)

David Chapman

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