

Notes on Job

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Introduction

TITLE

This book, like many others in the Old Testament, got its name from the central character in it rather than from its writer. While it is possible that Job may have written it, there is no concrete evidence that he did.

"Job" means "hated" or "much persecuted." Perhaps Job was a nickname his friends gave him during his suffering. Job is the title of the book in the Hebrew, Greek (Septuagint), Latin (Vulgate), and English Bibles.

DATE

Concerning the time the events recorded took place, there have been many views, ranging from the patriarchal age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (beginning about 2100 B.C.) to the second century B.C.

Internal evidence suggests that Job lived in the patriarchal period. The length of his life (he lived 140 years after his trials ended, 42:16) is similar to that of Terah (205 years), Abraham (175 years), Isaac (180 years), and Jacob (147 years). Lloyd Anderson believed that the length of Job's life argues for his living about 500 years before Abraham.¹ The writer measured Job's wealth in terms of his livestock. This is how Moses evaluated the wealth of Abraham and Jacob (1:3; 42:12; cf. Gen. 12:16; 13:2; 30:43; 32:5). The Sabeans and Chaldeans (1:15, 17) were nomads during the patriarchal period, but not later. The Hebrew word for "piece of money" (*qesitah*; 42:11) is found elsewhere only in connection with Jacob

¹See Lloyd Anderson, *The Hidden Beauty of Hebrew Genealogies*, pp. 154-94.

(Gen. 33:19; cf. Josh 24:32).¹ Job gave his daughters inheritances along with their brothers, which was not done under the Law of Moses (Job 42:15; cf. Num. 27:8).

Job was the priest of his family (1:5), a custom that became less common when nations in the ancient Near East developed more organization. Names of people and places in the book were also common in the patriarchal age (e.g., Sheba, Tema, Eliphaz, Uz, Job). Genesis, the Mari documents, and the Egyptian Execration texts, all of which refer to life in the Near East at this time, also refer to these names. The preference for the divine name *Shaddai*, over Yahweh, may indicate a period before the Exodus (cf. Exod. 3:14-15). Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown believed that Job is probably the oldest book in the world.²

"The idea that Job has an Edomite background is as old as the LXX [Septuagint], which equates Job with Jobab, king of Edom (Gn. 36:33)."³

"... the book of Job treats a fundamental question of our common humanity; and the poet has studiously taken his hero not from Israelitish history, but from extra-Israelitish tradition."⁴

If Job lived in the patriarchal period, as the evidence seems to suggest, what clues are there that someone did not *write* this book then, or very soon afterwards? The detailed recounting of the conversations that took place certainly suggests a composition date fairly close to that of the actual events. That has been the position of Jewish and Christian scholars for centuries. Critics point to the fact that oral tradition was very exact in the ancient world and that people could have transmitted Job's story by mouth for generations and retained its purity. With the Holy Spirit's superintending work it could have been, but there is no evidence that this is what happened.⁵

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), 2020 edition, unless otherwise indicated.

²Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 362.

³Francis I. Andersen, *Job*, p. 58. Cf. Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, p. 66.

⁴Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 1:6.

⁵Roy B. Zuck listed 12 evidences that Job lived in the patriarchal in *Job*, pp. 9-11.

Literacy was widespread in the ancient world in the patriarchal period.¹ Critics of an early writing further point out that in the process of social evolution, composition of a work such as this book was more typical at a date much later than the patriarchal period.² Yet, again, there is no evidence that someone wrote it later. The simpler explanation is that someone wrote it early. Since there is no proof that someone wrote it later, many conservative scholars have continued to prefer the traditional early date of composition theory.

"Most recent writers [are not conservative and] are agreed that in its original form the book was of post-exilic origin, and the secondary parts of later composition."³

"Fortunately, nothing significant is at stake in our lack of knowledge of an author or a date of composition for the book."⁴

WRITER

The book does not identify its writer. Furthermore, the ancient Hebrews could not agree on who wrote it. Consequently many different scholars have made guesses as to who the writer was. Internal evidence has led many careful students of the book to conclude that it was the work of one person. Perhaps someone else added a few minor touches later under divine inspiration (e.g., 42:16-17).

From the patriarchal period, Job himself is the favored candidate, though some scholars have nominated Elihu.⁵ These men seem to be the most likely of the chief characters to have preserved the record of Job's trials. There are many examples of ancient extra-biblical writings in which the author spoke of himself in the third person, so we need not eliminate Job

¹Alan R. Millard, "The Question of Israelite Literacy," *Bible Review* 3:3 (Fall 1987):22-31.

²One conservative scholar who believed that Job was written later, in the period beginning with Solomon and ending with the appearance of the writing prophets, was J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 139.

³H. H. Rowley, *Job*, p. 21. Rowley published this opinion in 1970. Cf. Gordis, p. 216-18.

⁴Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 226.

⁵E.g., Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 514.

on that ground. The book reads as though an eyewitness of the events wrote it.

Jewish tradition favored Moses as the writer.¹ In the Syriac Peshitta, Job follows Deuteronomy, reflecting belief that Moses wrote Job. Moses recorded other events during the patriarchal period in Genesis, he was familiar with desert life, and he had the ability to write such a book as this one.

Solomon has supporters mainly because he composed other poetic biblical literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon).² Moreover there are some similarities between Job and Proverbs, such as the relationship between fearing God and being wise. There are also similarities to Isaiah and Lamentations.³

Other scholars have suggested later writers, including Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Ezra. John Hartley noted that the author wrote in a dialect closer to Aramaic than to the Hebrew of Jerusalem, which many of the Old Testament writers used.⁴

Of course, the writer may have been none of these individuals. No one knows for sure who wrote Job. I tend to prefer a contemporary of Job, or Job himself, because of the antiquity of this view, and the fact that no one has proved it erroneous. However, Delitzsch, in his excellent commentary on Job, has made a strong case for Job living in the area south of Damascus during the patriarchal period, and the book being written in the Solomonic era.⁵ There is a very old monastery, perhaps the oldest monastery in existence, honoring Job south of Damascus.⁶

It is refreshing to read the author of one of the most exhaustive modern commentaries on Job admit: "Of its [the Book of Job's] author or date of composition I frankly know nothing."⁷

¹ *Baba Bathra* 14a (in the Babylonian Talmud).

² See *The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 824.

³ See John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, pp. 11-12, for a chart of Job's affinities with other Old Testament books.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ Delitzsch, especially 1:18-26; 2:395-447.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 2:394, for a map of this region.

⁷ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xxix.

PURPOSE

God inspired this book to reveal answers to questions that arise from God's nature and His dealings with human beings. Specifically, what is the basis on which God deals with people? Elsewhere in the Old Testament we find God typically repaying good with good and evil with evil, but that is not how He dealt with Job.

"How can a God who elsewhere in Scripture is described as the very essence of love and grace initiate or even allow suffering in the lives of His saints? How can His attributes be reconciled with His actions, especially when those actions appear to run counter to all He claims to be?"¹

"Why do afflictions upon afflictions befall the righteous man? This is the question, the answering of which is made the theme of the book of Job."²

"The book of Job places the stress on God's ways, not Job's suffering."³

"Besides displaying one man's faith in God in times of suffering, the book of Job also has a 'missionary' purpose. That is, a believer's suffering should be viewed, as seen in Job's experience, as an opportunity to witness not only to God's sovereignty but also to his goodness, justice, grace, and love to the nonbelieving world."⁴

"The final solution of the problem which this marvelous book sets forth, is then this: the suffering of the righteous, in its deepest cause, is the conflict of the seed of the woman with the seed of the serpent, which ends in the head of the serpent being trampled under foot; it is the type or copy of the suffering of Christ, the Holy God, who has himself borne our sins, and in the constancy of His reconciling love has

¹Eugene H. Merrill, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 376.

²Delitzsch, 1:1. Cf. Gordis, p. 47.

³Kenneth G. Hanna, *From Moses to Malachi*, p. 263.

⁴Larry J. Waters, "Suffering in the Book of Job," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 111.

withstood, even to the final overthrow, the assault of wrath and of the angel of wrath."¹

"At one time or another, almost everyone has felt like Job. While going through trials and times of suffering, we are often overwhelmed by self-pity. We want an explanation for why God allows trials to happen to us. The Book of Job records the troubling questions, the terrifying doubts, and the very real anguish of a sufferer. The Book of Job can help us in the time when we are surrounded with troubles by giving us a glimpse of God's perspective on our suffering."²

"The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God's justice and love."³

"The Book of Job represents the supreme achievement of Hebrew Wisdom."⁴

David Clines called this book: "the most intense book theologically and intellectually of the Old Testament."⁵

SCOPE

It is also difficult to determine how much time the events narrated in the book cover.

The first chapter tells about Job's life before his trial, and the last chapter reveals what happened after it until Job's death. The chapters in between deal with a relatively short period in Job's long life. How long was this period?

¹Delitzsch, 1:32.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 824.

³John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 311.

⁴Gordis, p. 43.

⁵Clines, p. xii.

We have a few clues. Job referred to months when he spoke of his sufferings (7:3; 29:2). In view of Job's physical symptoms his ailments seem to have bothered him for several months at least. He may have suffered for years. The apocryphal Testament of Job says Job suffered for seven years (5:9). However, Job said the same people who had respected him previously had come to reject and avoid him. He implied that his rejection was fairly recent.

The main part of the book contains dialogue that took place between a few individuals. There is no indication in the text that extended periods of time interrupted Job's sojourn at the city "dump" where these conversations took place. They seem to have continued for a few days at the most, though the conversations may have stopped and then restarted. The writer may have telescoped the events to keep the narrative flowing smoothly. It appears that the scope of the main scene at the city dump lasted no longer than a few days or possibly weeks.

GENRE

Job is primarily a combination of at least three literary types: lawsuit,¹ lament,² and controversy dialogue.³ The larger category that includes all three is wisdom literature.

"Within the canon of Old Testament Scripture, the distinctive contribution of the Wisdom books is that they expound the relevance of the foundational covenant revelation through Moses to the great issues of man's life in this world, more specifically, of man's life apart from the peculiarly theocratic context of Israelite history."⁴

"In terms of content, the book could be called a theodicy, a justification of God's way in the world. ... Perhaps a better

¹See Sylvia H. Scholnick, "Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975).

²See Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*, pp. 1-15.

³See James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom," in *Old Testament Form Criticism*, pp. 228, 254. Gregory W. Parsons, "Literary Features of the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):213-29, argued for all three.

⁴Meredith G. Kline, "Job," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 459.

designation of the genre of the book is 'wisdom debate.' This describes both its form and the content (Zerafa)."¹

There are so many different types of literature in this book that many writers despair of assigning one type as the dominant one.

"The book of Job defies all efforts to establish its literary genre. While it has been viewed as an epic,² a tragedy,³ and a parable,⁴ upon close analysis it is none of these even though it exhibits properties belonging to each of them. As Robert Gordis observes, the author of Job has created his own literary genre.⁵ The book is didactic in the sense that the author seeks to teach religious truth, a task which he executes primarily by means of lyrical poetry expressive of deep emotions."⁶

Franz Delitzsch regarded the book as primarily a didactic poem.⁷

"The book of Job is an astonishing mixture of almost every kind of literature to be found in the Old Testament. Many individual pieces can be isolated and identified as proverbs, riddles, hymns, laments, curses, lyrical nature poems."⁸

"Job has more words of unique occurrence and a richer vocabulary than any other biblical book."⁹

"Many Old Testament words are found only in the book of Job. In fact, Job has 110 hapax legomena (words that are not found

¹Longman and Dillard, p. 232. Paragraph division omitted. Their reference is to P. Zerafa, *The Wisdom of God in the Book of Job*.

²Nahum M. Sarna, "Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957):13-25.

³Horace M. Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy*, pp. 3-38.

⁴Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, p. 486.

⁵Gordis, p. 7.

⁶C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, p. 69. See Daniel J. Estes, "The Hermeneutics of Biblical Lyric Poetry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):413-30.

⁷Delitzsch, 1:9, 15. See also Sanford C. Yoder, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, p. 91.

⁸Andersen, p. 33.

⁹Gordis, p. 160.

elsewhere in the Old Testament)—more than any other Old Testament book."¹

"One should think of this aspect of interpretation [i.e., genre] as being like the Olympics, a grand occasion made up of a variety of sports. Though it is all sport, each game is played by its own rules and has its own expectations about how to play the game. The variety of literature is the same way. It all has a message, but it conveys that message in a variety of ways and with a variety of expectations. To try to play basketball with soccer's rules will never work, though both use a ball and require foot speed. Or think of musical instruments, they all make music, but in different ways with different sounds. One cannot play the violin like a piano or drums; nor should one expect a violin to sound like either a piano or the kettledrum! In the same way, to read the poetry of the Psalms like a historical book is to miss the emotional and pictorial impact of the message, though both genres convey reality about people's experience with God."²

"... if all the poetry [in the Old Testament] were gathered together into one location, the corpus would be larger than the New Testament."³

HISTORICITY

Is the Book of Job a piece of history writing, or is it historical fiction? Did the writer accurately transcribe everything that the book records as it happened, or sometime thereafter, or did he embellish an event and add non-historical material? Many scholars take the book as complete fiction.⁴

¹Zuck, p. 7.

²Darrell L. Bock, "Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 85-86.

³Longman and Dillard, p. 29. See also Duane A. Garrett, "Song of Songs," in *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, pp. 40-47, for a helpful excursus on Hebrew poetry.

⁴Gordis, p. 66.

However, there are a number of factors that indicate that Job is not fiction.¹

First, the book opens with a statement that is very similar to others that introduce historical events (1:1; cf. Judg. 17:1; 1 Sam. 1:1). Second, other Scripture mentions Job as though he actually lived (cf. Ezek. 14:14; 20). However, there is another indication in the book that exact historical accuracy was not the intent of the writer: The dialogues are in poetic form, and people do not communicate with one another in poetry, especially when they are in extreme distress, but in prose. The dialogues do not appear to be transcripts of what the characters actually said. They may be accurate without being precise.

Therefore, I would conclude that Job really lived and went through the crisis that this book describes, but that the writer of the book took liberties and reworked some of the material. Putting the dialogues in poetic form has the effect of elevating the book from a story about one event to a story with universal application. I believe the story is rooted in history but told with literary embellishment—all under the superintending influence of God's Holy Spirit.²

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue chs. 1—2
 - A. Job's character 1:1-5
 - B. Job's calamities 1:6—2:10
 1. The first test 1:6-22
 2. The second test 2:1-10
 - C. Job's comforters 2:11-13
- II. The dialogue concerning the basis of the divine-human relationship 3:1— 42:6

¹See J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 3:29-32. See also Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, p. 19.

²See Longman and Dillard, p. 233.

- A. Job's personal lament ch. 3
 - 1. The wish that he had not been born 3:1-10
 - 2. The wish that he had died at birth 3:11-19
 - 3. The wish that he could die then 3:20-26

- B. The first cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 4—14
 - 1. Eliphaz's first speech chs. 4—5
 - 2. Job's first reply to Eliphaz chs. 6—7
 - 3. Bildad's first speech ch. 8
 - 4. Job's first reply to Bildad chs. 9—10
 - 5. Zophar's first speech ch. 11
 - 6. Job's first reply to Zophar chs. 12—14

- C. The second cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 15—21
 - 1. Eliphaz's second speech ch. 15
 - 2. Job's second reply to Eliphaz chs. 16—17
 - 3. Bildad's second speech ch. 18
 - 4. Job's second reply to Bildad ch. 19
 - 5. Zophar's second speech ch. 20
 - 6. Job's second reply to Zophar ch. 21

- D. The third cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 22—27
 - 1. Eliphaz's third speech ch. 22
 - 2. Job's third reply to Eliphaz chs. 23—24
 - 3. Bildad's third speech ch. 25
 - 4. Job's third reply to Bildad chs. 26—27

- E. Job's concluding soliloquies chs. 28—31
 - 1. Job's discourse on God's wisdom ch. 28
 - 2. Job's defense of his innocence chs. 29—31

- F. Elihu's speeches chs. 32—37
 - 1. The introduction of Elihu 32:1-5
 - 2. Elihu's first speech 32:6—33:33

- 3. Elihu's second speech ch. 34
 - 4. Elihu's third speech ch. 35
 - 5. Elihu's fourth speech chs. 36—37
- G. The cycle of speeches between Job and God 38:1—42:6
- 1. God's first speech 38:1—40:2
 - 2. Job's first reply to God 40:3-5
 - 3. God's second speech 40:6—41:34
 - 4. Job's second reply to God 42:1-6
- III. Epilogue 42:7-17
- A. Job's friends 42:7-9
 - B. Job's fortune 42:10-17
- Elmer Smick saw a chiasm in the structure of Job:¹
- A Prologue chs. 1—2
 - B Job's opening lament ch. 3
 - C Dialogue disputes (3 cycles) chs. 4—14; 15—21; 22—27
 - D Interlude on wisdom ch. 28
 - C' Monologues (3 cycles) chs. 29—31 (Job); 32—37 (Elihu); 38—41 (God)
 - B' Job's closing contribution chs. 40:3-5; 42:1-6
 - A' Epilogue ch. 42:7-17

MESSAGE

What this book is all about has been the subject of considerable debate. Many people think God gave it to us to provide His answer to the age-old problem of suffering.² In particular, many believe it is in the Bible to help us

¹Elmer B. Smick, "Architectonics, Structural Poems, and Rhetorical Devices in the Book of Job," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, p. 88. Cf. Westermann; J. F. A. Sawyer, "The Authorship and Structure of the Book of Job," *Studia Biblica* 1 (1983):253-57.

²E.g., Arno C. Gaebelien, *The Annotated Bible*, 2:1:127.

understand why good people suffer.¹ This is undoubtedly one of the purposes of the book, and one that I want to comment on at some length in the following exposition. However, I think another purpose is more foundational than this one.

At least one expositor believed that the primary purpose of the book is to teach repentance.² This has not been the conclusion of most students of Job.

Other people have focused on the great questions Job voiced in the book. During his suffering, when God allowed Satan to knock all the props that support human earthly existence out from under him, Job got down to the most basic needs that people face. He made many profound observations about life. He articulated the most fundamental needs that human beings have. He voiced the greatest philosophical questions about life. These questions are an extremely important contribution of the book, to which I plan to give some attention. Nevertheless, I think God has inspired and preserved the message of the Book of Job primarily for another reason.

I believe He did so because this book proves that the basic relationship that God has established with people does not rest on retribution but on grace. This is the message statement, from my point of view.

God blesses people for two reasons. These are: first, His sovereign choice to bless; second, people's response of trust and obedience to Him. Because we cannot control God's sovereign choice to bless some people more than others, we tend to forget that. We tend to focus on what we can control to some extent, namely: securing His blessing by trusting and obeying Him. This is understandable and legitimate, but it leads to a potential problem. The problem is that we may conclude that we can control God. Since God blesses those who trust and obey Him, and He curses those who do not, we may conclude that if we trust and obey God, He owes us blessing in this life.

This conclusion assumes that the basis of God's relationship with people is retribution: He gives people what they deserve. Those who hold the theory of retribution reason as follows: If I am good, God will reward me with blessing in some form, but if I am bad, He will punish me somehow in this

¹E.g., Baxter, 3:25.

²J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 2:580.

life. While this is normally the way God deals with human beings, it is not always His method. Consequently, there must be a more fundamental principle that governs God's dealings with people. On what basis does God consistently deal with us?

Throughout the Book of Job, this is the major question that God is answering. Every major character in the book—Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu—assumed that God governed humankind on the basis of retribution. They believed there were no exceptions to the rule that God blesses good people and punishes bad people in this life.

Job concluded that God was unjust, since, even though he had been good, God was allowing him to suffer anyway. Job's wife agreed with him. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar believed that Job had to be a bad man, rather than a good man, since he was suffering. Elihu felt that the solution to this apparent exception to the rule was not God's injustice or Job's sin, but Job's ignorance. Elihu took a more agnostic approach to the solution of Job's problem. He suspected Job was a bad man, but he was not as sure about that as Job's other three friends were.

The Book of Job reveals that while God *usually* blesses the godly and punishes the ungodly, He does not *always* do so in this life. There is a more fundamental basis from which God operates. That basis is His own free choice to bless or not bless whomever He will.

We might conclude then that the basis of God's dealings with mankind is His sovereignty. However, that answer goes too far back. God's sovereignty really has nothing to do with *how* He rules. The attribute of sovereignty only sets forth God's position as Supreme Ruler. How does God rule sovereignly? If it is not on the basis of retribution, on what basis is it?

Evidence in the Book of Job points to God's grace as the basis of His dealings with people. Instead of always dealing with people in retribution, God always deals with us in grace in this life. What does this mean? This means that instead of responding to our good actions with blessing, or our bad actions with cursing, consistently, God initiates favor toward us without our deserving it.

What is the evidence in the Book of Job that God always deals with people on this basis?

This comes through in God's responses to Job (chs. 38—41). In replying to Job, God essentially reminded him of how good He had been to Job. He pointed out how much wiser and stronger He was than Job. In all of this, God wanted to impress Job with His favor toward the patriarch. That Job got the point is clear from the fact that when God finished speaking, Job simply rested in God (42:6). He returned to his joy in being the recipient of God's unmerited favor—even though God had not answered his questions. Furthermore, 42:10 shows that God doubled His blessings for Job in the end.

How does the conflict in heaven that we learn about in chapters 1 and 2 fit into this view? Satan, too, believed that retribution was the basis on which God deals with people (1:9-11). God proceeded to show the devil that he was wrong. God allowed calamities to overtake a good man. Then, when Job's trouble was all over, God blessed him—even though he did not trust and obey God as he should have done during his trials (42:12-17).

Satan has consistently failed to appreciate God's grace. Instead of being grateful for his own blessings, he has been in rebellion to obtain more than God gave him. Moreover he has led people to do the same things (cf. Gen. 3; Matt. 4).

I would also like to comment on a fourth possible message of the book that some people have suggested. Some students of Job have said that the whole purpose of the book is to show God's superiority over Satan. Not many people hold this view, but it has appealed to some. The main problem with this interpretation, from my viewpoint, is that the dialogues and monologues that constitute the bulk of the book, in chapters 3—41, contribute nothing to this theme. While they do contain references to God's greatness, they do not deal with the issue of God's superiority over Satan.

Finally, here are some observations about the great revelation of this book, namely: that the basis for God's dealings with man is His grace rather than His retribution.

First, the Book of Job appears to have been one of the first books of the Bible that God gave as special revelation, if not the first. If it was one of the first, its subject would have been one of the most foundational for human beings to understand, as history unfolded.¹ What more basic

¹See Hanna, p. 262.

revelation could God give than the message of this book? The reassuring knowledge that God initiates favor toward His creatures, without their earning or deserving it, is at the heart of God's plan of salvation and the doctrine of God (who He is). I suggest that when we think of Job, we should think of God's grace (cf. Ps. 103:10). Charles Hodge defined grace as "love exercised towards the unworthy."¹

Second, like Satan, we tend to disbelieve that God wants the best for us, and we doubt that He will give it to us. Consequently, we try to secure what we want for ourselves. We also become ungrateful for God's grace. Ingratitude is at the root of much sin, as well as much unhappiness, in life. We should rejoice in God's grace! We should cultivate a spirit of thankfulness (1 Thess. 5:18).

Third, we tend to elevate a secondary principle of God's dealings with people (retribution) into the primary position, because it enables us to feel we have some control over God. In this way we can get God to serve us, rather than our serving God. If I can obligate God to bless me by being good, then God owes me something. Many people, of course, believe God owes them salvation, because they are good people. However, we cannot dictate to God how He should bless us. We can count on His promises to bless in certain ways when we relate to Him in certain ways. Yet if God does not bless us as we wish He would, when we do not have His promise fulfilled, we can still count on the fact that He will bless us ultimately. He will do so because it is His will and He has promised to bless the righteous. His basis of dealing with us is grace.

What about non-believers? If God wants to bless everyone, why does He send some to eternal torment? The fact that some people choose not to accept God's grace does not mean He does not reach out to them with grace. The whole Bible is a testimony to the fact that God always has, and always will, reach out to humankind offering unmerited favor. The basis of God's dealings with humankind is grace. His common grace extends to all (Rom. 1; Eph. 1). He sends rain on the just and the unjust. God does not give us what we deserve. He gives us much better than we deserve.

Galatians 6:7 ("Whatsoever a man's sows, that shall he also reap.") is perfectly true when we take the long view of life that includes life after death. An incorrect understanding of retribution is that God will repay

¹Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:427.

everyone *in this life*: before death. But He always repays after death, though He sometimes does before death too.

Exposition

I. PROLOGUE CHS. 1—2

The writer composed the prologue and epilogue of this book in prose narrative and the main body (3:1—42:6) in poetry. The prologue and epilogue form a frame around the main emphasis of the revelation, the poetic section, and provide information that helps the reader put the central dialogue in context. This chiasmic A-B-A pattern recurs throughout the book in its various subsections.

"The prose tale in the prologue and epilogue is written in exquisite biblical Hebrew, on a par with the classic narratives in Genesis and Samuel."¹

Matthew Henry believed that the discourse between God and Satan, in these chapters, "is parabolic, like that of Micaiah (1 Kings xxii. 19, &c.) and an allegory designed to represent the malice of the devil against good men and the divine check and restraint which that malice is under."² This seems possible to me, though I believe that if it is an allegory, it represents reality accurately.

In the prologue, events proceed rapidly, in contrast to the slow-paced poetic section. The writer's purpose here was quite clearly to set the stage for what follows. He presented two facts that form a foundation for all that follows: Job was a righteous man, and his suffering was undeserved. Gaebelein wrote that Job's name means "persecuted" or "afflicted."³

"In the *exposition* [1:1—2:10] the scene is set, the characters are introduced, and all the necessary conditions for the plot are established. In the *complication* [2:11—31:40], the characters encounter difficulties or dangers, and tensions emerge that excite the reader's curiosity as to how they can possibly be resolved. The *resolution* [32:1—42:17] portrays how the narrative problem posed by the story is solved."⁴

¹Gordis, p. 163.

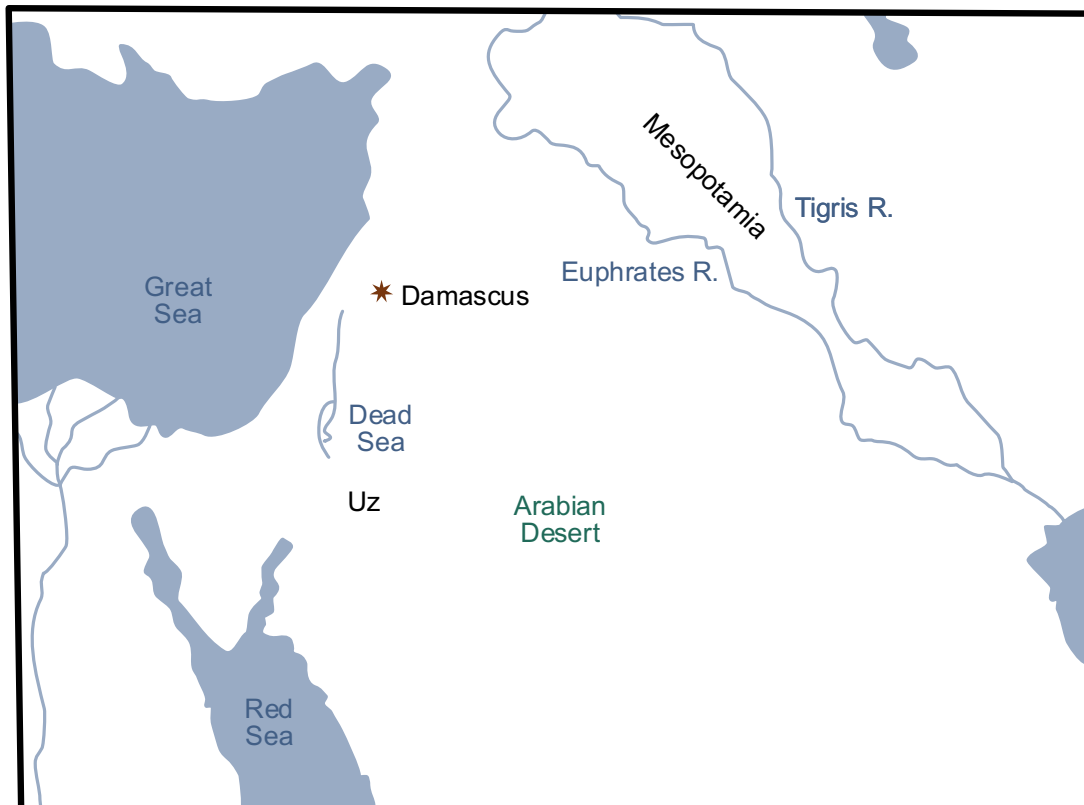
²Henry, p. 516.

³Gaebelein, 2:1:130.

⁴Clines, p. xxxvi.

A. JOB'S CHARACTER 1:1-5

Uz (1:1) was probably southeast of the Dead Sea (cf. vv. 3, 14, 19; 42:12).¹ Some scholars place it in Bashan south of Damascus,² but the writer of Lamentations (probably Jeremiah) associated the land of Uz with Edom (Lam. 4:21). Another suggestion is that Uz was in the Arabian desert west of Babylon.³ References to customs, geography, and natural history elsewhere in the book support this general location (cf. Jer. 25:20). All possible locations are outside Canaan, suggesting that the message of this book is universal and not related exclusively to the Israelites.⁴ Another indication of the same thing is that the writer did not identify when Job lived.



Job was no ordinary man. He was not even an ordinary good man (cf. v. 8; 2:3). He was an exceptionally admirable person because of his character

¹See *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Uz," by G. Frederick Owen, 5:852-53.

²W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:386.

³E.g., Delitzsch, 1:46; Henry, p. 515.

⁴Charles W. Carter, "The Book of Job," in *Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, 2:14.

and conduct (1:1). "Blameless" (Heb. *tam*) means straightforward and complete (cf. Dan. 6:4). The Hebrew word usually describes integrity and spiritual maturity. When Job sinned, he dealt with his sin appropriately, an evidence of his blamelessness. Job was not sinless (cf. 13:26; 14:16-17). "Upright" (Heb. *yasar*) refers to behavior that is in harmony with God's ways. The Hebrew word means ethically correct.

"He is not Everyman; he is unique."¹

"The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, was the hallmark of Job."²

"This descriptive phrase [describing Job] indicates that Job was the epitome of wisdom (28:28; Prov. 3:7; 14:16; see also Prov. 1:7; 9:10)."³

"Hokmah ["wisdom"] may be defined as a realistic approach to the problems of life, including all the practical skills and technical arts of civilization."⁴

Job was wealthy as well as godly (1:2-3). Evidently there were several other great (wealthy) men in that part of the world in his day, but Job surpassed them all.

"Here in the first two sentences of the book [vv. 1-2] we find spelled out the doctrine of retribution, wearing its more acceptable face: piety brings prosperity."⁵

"... the meaning [of verse 4] is apparently that the seven brothers took it in turn to entertain on the seven days of every week, so that every day was a feast day. This is more natural than the view that the reference is to birthdays, when there would be seven feasts a year. This is all part of the artistry of the story, to build up the picture of the ideal happiness of Job and his family."⁶

¹Andersen, p. 79.

²Kline, p. 461.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 826.

⁴Gordis, p. 31.

⁵Clines, p. xxxix.

⁶Rowley, p. 29.

Job demonstrated the proper spiritual concern for his own family members, as well as interest in their physical and social welfare (v. 5). Evidently he offered sacrifices each week for his children in case they had committed sins in their merriment. The phrase "getting up early in the morning" is a common Hebrew idiom for conscientious activity (cf. Gen. 22:3; et al.). It does not necessarily limit the time of Job's sacrifice.¹

"There were ten whole sacrifices offered by Job on each opening day of the weekly round, at the dawn of the Sunday; and one has therefore to imagine this round of entertainment as beginning with the first-born on the first day of the week."²

"The author uses the numbers three, seven, and ten, all symbolic of completeness, to demonstrate that Job's wealth was staggering."³

Job's character is important because this book reveals that the basis of the relationship between God and people is essentially God's sovereign grace and, secondarily, our response of trust and obedience. As stated above, the basic problem the Book of Job sets forth seems to be the relationship between God and man.⁴

"The book of Job deals essentially with man's relationship with God, centering on two questions. The first question is, Why does man worship God? ... The second question is, How will man react to God when God seems unconcerned about his problems?"⁵

God chose to test an extremely righteous man so that all of us could see that it was not Job's personal goodness that formed the basis for his

¹Andersen, p. 81.

²Delitzsch, 1:50.

³Hartley, p. 68.

⁴Gregory W. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:550 (April-June 1981):143. See also Henry L. Rowold, "The Theology of Creation in the Yahweh Speeches as a Solution to the Problem Posed by the Book of Job," pp. 11, 19; John W. Wevers, *The Way of the Righteous*, p. 75; Robert W. E. Forrest, "The Creation Motif in the Book of Job," p. 20; Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, pp. 197-98; Zuck, p. 189; Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 (May 1966):259-70.

⁵Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 219. Paragraph division omitted.

relationship with God. If Job suffered, being righteous, righteousness must not preclude suffering or guarantee God's protection.¹

Job was righteous in God's estimate as well as in the eyes of his fellowmen (vv. 1, 8). Evidently he was a believer in Yahweh. He had apparently heard about Yahweh and placed his trust in Him, as did other Old Testament saints similar to him (e.g., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, et al.). The fact that Job confessed to being self-righteous (42:5-6) does not preclude his having a proper standing with God by faith.² Many true believers become self-righteous in their thinking.

B. JOB'S CALAMITIES 1:6—2:10

There are three kinds of suffering: calamity (cf. Luke 13:1-5), chastisement (discipline; cf. Heb. 12:6), and punishment (cf. Rom. 12:19).³ Job's sufferings were not chastisement (to teach him) nor punishment (for sins committed) but as a result of calamities that God allowed him to experience.

God permitted Satan to test Job twice.⁴ The first test touched his possessions, including his children (1:6-22), and the second, his person (2:1-10). God permitted Satan to afflict Job to demonstrate and to purify Job's motives for worshipping God and for living a godly life (cf. James 1:2-4). The writer takes us behind the scenes in this pericope (section of text, 1:6—2:10) so we can know why Job's calamities befell him, the very question that Job and his friends debated in the chapters that follow. In each test, we first see Satan accusing Job in heaven, and then attacking him on earth.

"No true servant of God escapes the eye of the adversary of God."⁵

¹See Larry J. Waters, "Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):436-51.

²See Brian P. Gault, "Job's Hope: Redeemer or Retribution?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:690 (April-June 2016):147-65.

³William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:414.

⁴For a summary of what the Book of Job teaches about God, see Zuck, *A Theology ...*, pp. 219-26.

⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 364.

The Scriptures consistently affirm that God tempts no one (James 1:13). That is, He is not the source of temptation and, therefore, the author of evil. He does not seduce people, trying to get them to sin. However, it is equally clear that God allows people to experience temptation from other sources—ultimately for their welfare (James 1:2-18). The primary sources of our temptation are the world (1 John 2:15-16), the flesh (James 1:14), and the devil (Job 1—2).

1. The first test 1:6-22

These verses reveal that angels ("sons of God," v. 6), including Satan, periodically report to God on their activities. Satan was doing on this occasion what he did in the Garden of Eden, and still does today, namely, "seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).¹ In Eden, Satan disparaged God to Eve. Here he disparaged Job to God.²

Some interpreters have understood the "sons of God" to be the godly men of that time, and that they voluntarily presented themselves to Yahweh on the earth, not in heaven (cf. Gen. 4:16; Jon. 1:3, 10). However, most Bible students have concluded, correctly I think, that Satan and some angels appeared before Yahweh in heaven.³

The writer referred to God as "the LORD" (Yahweh) here (v. 7), suggesting that He was known as such when the book was written. This argues for a post-Exodus date of composition in the minds of some (cf. Exod. 3:14-15).⁴ However, a later inspired writer may have updated the name, though this seems unlikely to me.

Notice that it was God who first drew Satan's attention to Job (v. 8); it was not Satan who initiated Job's trials. Satan only accused Job after God brought Job to Satan's attention. Thus we see the sovereignty of God at work in Job's life.

¹For a summary of what the Book of Job teaches about angels, see Zuck, *A Theology ...*, p. 232. See too Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

²Kline, p. 462.

³See Baxter, 3:40-42.

⁴E.g., *The Nelson ...*, p. 824.

"God knew what His servant Job needed, and Himself brings forward his case and sets all in movement."¹

Satan accused God of bribing Job so he would act piously (vv. 9-11). In effect, he said, "You have to pay Job to love You and serve You. You have paid lovers."² This charge articulates one of the main questions of this book: Why do righteous people such as Job live upright lives? Satan said Job did so because Job had learned that there is an inevitable connection between deed and state of being (i.e., godliness results in prosperity). This idea, that the relationship between God and man rests on retribution—we always reap in kind during our lifetime what we sow—is one that Job held. However, his fear (reverential trust) of God ran deeper than Satan realized.

"Believers today should take great comfort from the biblical teaching that the Lord protects His people—whether by a cloud (Ex. 14:19, 20), or by a wall of fiery hosts (2 Kin. 6:17), or through guardian angels (Heb. 1:14)."³

Satan determined to prove that Job would not obey God if he got hardship in return. He claimed that selfishness prompted Job's obedience rather than love. Satan also believed that God would not get worship from Job if He stopped blessing him.

"Cynicism is the essence of the satanic. The Satan believes nothing to be genuinely good—neither Job in his disinterested piety nor God in His disinterested generosity."⁴

Since the English word *satan* is a transliteration of the Hebrew *satan*, meaning adversary, it is not uncommon for writers to refer to Satan as "the Satan," namely, the ultimate adversary.

"Those are like the devil who cannot endure that anybody should be praised but themselves. ... Job's friends charged him with hypocrisy because he was greatly afflicted, Satan because he greatly prospered."⁵

¹J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 2:44.

²McGee, 2:588.

³Ibid., p. 827.

⁴Andersen, p. 84.

⁵Henry, p. 516.

The four disasters that quickly befell Job came alternately from earth and heaven: the Sabeian attack, fire from heaven, the Chaldean raid, and the great wind (vv. 13-19). Job must have felt that both people and God (i.e. everyone) had turned against him. Note that Satan has the power—subject to God's authority—to control people and the weather.

"We see here, in dramatic form, the truth that Satan, for all his boasted independence, is in actual fact the servant of God."¹

Why does God allow Satan to test believers? He allowed Satan to test Job in order to silence Satan and to strengthen Job's character (cf. Gen. 22:1; James 1:2-18).

"The primary purpose of Job's suffering, unknown to him, was that he should stand before men and angels as a trophy of the saving might of God ..."²

"From the outset, the writer reminds us that, no matter what happens in this world and in our lives, God is on the throne and has everything under control."³

This incident is a good example of the permissive will of God. Some have claimed that there is no such thing as the permissive will of God.⁴ They believe that the initiative to test Job came from God, and He simply used Satan to accomplish His purpose. However, the text presents Satan as taking the initiative in tormenting Job, and God permitting him to pursue his purpose—under God's sovereign control.

The fact that the oxen were plowing (v. 14) may indicate that these events happened in the winter, since plowing normally took place then. The Sabaeans (v. 15) may have come from a region in southwest Arabia called Sheba or from the town of Sheba located in upper Arabia (cf. Gen. 10:7; 25:3). The Chaldeans (v. 17) came from Mesopotamia to the north and

¹Hugh Evan Hopkins, *The Mystery of Suffering*, p. 51.

²Kline, p. 461.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, "Job," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Wisdom and Poetry*, p. 11.

⁴See, for example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:18:1.

were at this time nomadic marauders, assuming a patriarchal period setting of the events.¹

Tearing one's robe (v. 20) typically expressed great grief in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 37:29; Lev. 10:6; Josh. 7:6; 2 Sam. 13:19). It symbolized the rending of one's heart (cf. Joel 2:13). Shaving the head (v. 20) evidently symbolized the loss of personal glory (cf. Isa. 15:2; 22:12; Jer. 7:29; 16:6 41:5; 47:5; 48:37; Ezek. 7:18; Amos 8:10; Mic. 1:16). When a person mourned, he or she put off all personal adornments, including what nature provided (cf. Jer. 7:29; Mic. 1:16). Hair in the ancient world was a symbol of one's glory (cf. 2 Sam. 14:26). Job apparently fell to the ground to worship God (v. 20). A mother's womb is a figure used elsewhere to describe the earth (cf. Ps. 139:13, 15; Eccles. 5:15; 12:7), so Job's statement that he would return there is understandable (v. 21).

Job's recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty (v. 21) was a key to passing his test (cf. 1 Tim. 6:7). In some respects he regarded God as an equal (cf. 9:33), but deep down in his soul he knew that God was his sovereign. This conception of God is one that Job never lost, though many people who go through trials do.²

"In this sentence, then, of response to the disaster that has befallen him, the Book of Job reaches—for the first time—what I argue in this commentary to be its primary aim: to portray how one should behave under suffering."³

"The writer here intentionally makes Job call God Yahweh. In the dialogue portion, the name Yahweh occurs only once in the mouth of Job (ch. xii. 9); most frequently the speakers use Elohim and Shaddai. ... Accordingly, Job, when he says Yahweh, thinks of God not only as the absolute cause of his fate, but as the Being ordering his life according to His own counsel, who is ever worthy of praise, whether in His infinite wisdom He gives or takes away."⁴

¹Kline, p. 462.

²See Charles R. Swindoll, *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back*, ch. 4: "Loss: Lonely Times of Crisis," pp. 49-60.

³Clines, p. 38.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:65.

"Job's exclamation is the noblest expression to be found anywhere of a man's joyful acceptance of the will of God as his only good. A man may stand before God stripped of everything that life has given him, and still lack nothing."¹

"Anybody can say, 'The Lord gave' or 'The Lord hath taken away'; but it takes real faith to say in the midst of sorrow and suffering, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"²

Job grieved, but he also worshipped. These two activities are not incompatible. He saw God's hand in the events of his life. Moreover he had a proper perspective on his possessions. His faith did not relieve his agony; it caused it. Many people believe that if one has enough faith, he or she will always be happy. Job's experience does not bear this out. We should have a deep-seated joy no matter what happens to us, knowing that we are in the Lord's hands and that He has permitted whatever happens to us (Phil. 4:4). But we may not always be happy, namely, enjoying our circumstances.

"If I know that God sends afflictions to me because, since sin and evil are come into the world, they are the indispensable means of purifying and testing me, and by both purifying and testing of [*sic*] perfecting me,—these are explanations with which I can and must console myself."³

2. The second test 2:1-10

Satan again claimed that Job served God only because God had made it profitable for Job to do so. Job still had his own life. Satan insinuated that Job had been willing to part with his own children and his animals (wealth) since he still had his own life ("skin," v. 4).⁴

"Satan implies that Job, by his doxology had only feigned love for God as the exorbitant but necessary fee for health insurance."⁵

¹Andersen, p. 88.

²Wiersbe, p. 12.

³Delitzsch, 1:4.

⁴Ibid., 1:68.

⁵Kline, p. 463.

Again we see that Satan could do nothing to Job without God's permission. Having received that, he went out to strip Job of his health. In view of the symptoms mentioned later in the book, Job's ailment (vv. 7-8) seems to have been a disease called pemphigus foliaceus or something similar to it, perhaps elephantiasis¹ (cf. vv. 7, 8, 12; 3:24-25; 7:5; 9:18; 16:16; 19:17, 20; 30:17, 27, 30; 33:21). It appears to have afflicted Job for several months (cf. 7:3; 29:2).

Job's illness resulted in an unclean condition that made him a social outcast (cf. Exod. 9:9-11). He had to take up residence near the city dump where beggars and other social rejects stayed. He had formerly sat at the city gate and enjoyed social prestige as a town judge (29:7). The change in his location, from the best to the worst place, reflects the change in his circumstances, from the best to the worst conditions.

A second effect of his disease was his wife's reaction (v. 9). She evidently concluded that God was not being fair with Job. He had lived a godly life, but God had afflicted rather than awarded him. She had the same retributive view of the divine-human relationship that Job and his friends did, but she was "foolish" (v. 10, spiritually ignorant, not discerning). Her frustration in seeing her husband suffer without being able to help him or to understand his situation undoubtedly aggravated her already raw emotions. She too had lost all of her children. She gives evidence in the text of being bitter toward God. Had she been simply anxious that Job's suffering would end, she probably would not have urged him to abandon his upright manner of life by cursing God.

Note that Job did not respond to his wife's suggestion by saying that she was a fool, which has been the response of many a man in similar circumstances. He said that she was speaking like a fool. Her advice was out of character. She knew better than to speak as she did. Job's response to his wife shows his admirable respect for her and his self-control.

"The narrative reminds us repeatedly of the temptation in Eden (Gen 3). Job's wife plays a role remarkably like that of Eve. Each woman succumbed to the tempter and became his instrument for the undoing of her husband. Satan had spared

¹Delitzsch, 1:69-70.

Job's wife—as he had spared the four messengers—for his further use in his war on Job's soul."¹

"If Satan leaves anything that he has permission to take away, it is with a design of mischief."²

"In times of severe testing, our first question must not be, 'How can I get out of this?' but 'What can I get out of this?'"³

The third result of Job's suffering was his fresh submission to God (v. 10). Even though Job did not understand why he was in agony, he refused to sin with his lips by cursing God. He continued to worship God even though he gained nothing in return (cf. James 5:11). This response proved Satan wrong (v. 5) and vindicated God's words (v. 3).

Though many people today conclude, as Job's wife did, that the reason for suffering is that God is unjust, this is never the reason good people suffer. The basis for the relationship between God and man is not retribution, with good deeds resulting in prosperity and bad deeds yielding punishment in this life.⁴

These two tests of Job reveal much about Satan. He is accountable to God. God knows Satan's thoughts. Satan is an accuser of the righteous. He knows what is going on in the world and in the lives of individuals, though there is no evidence in Scripture that he can read people's minds. He has great power over individuals and nature, but his power is subject to the sovereign authority of God. He is not omnipresent, nor omniscient, nor omnipotent. He can do nothing without God's permission, and God's permission involves limitations on him. God remains aware of what His people are experiencing in connection with Satan's activity.⁵

Job actually experienced seven tests: (1) the destruction of his oxen, donkeys, and servants (1:13-15); (2) the loss of his sheep and servants (1:16); (3) the loss of his camels and servants (1:17); (4) the death of his

¹Andersen, p. 88. Cf. Gaebelien, 2:1:135.

²Henry, p. 518.

³Wiersbe, p. 13.

⁴For a critique of the "prosperity gospel" movement, which teaches that it is never God's will for any believer to be sick or poor, see Ken K. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.

⁵Baxter, 3:37-40.

children (1:18-19); (5) the loss of his health (2:7-8); (6) the antagonism of his wife (2:9); and the hurtful, critical, and accusatory explanations from his friends (2:11—37:24). Since seven often represents a complete work in the Bible—as in the seven days of creation—the writer presented Job's sufferings as complete, exhaustive, full-blown.

J. Sidlow Baxter gave a summary of Job's losses: (1) his wealth, (2) his children, (3) his health, (4) the fellowship of his wife, (5) the sympathy of his friends, (6) his self-worth, (7) his sense of fellowship of God, and (8) an appreciation of the goodness of God's government.¹

"... till Christ came, no soul was ever made such a battleground between heaven and hell, as Job's soul was made."²

C. JOB'S COMFORTERS 2:11-13

Actually, four men came to visit Job, though the writer did not mention Elihu's presence until chapter 32. Eliphaz seems to have been the oldest for several reasons. His name occurs first (2:11; 42:9), he spoke before the others, his speeches are longer and more mature, and God spoke to him as the representative of the others (42:7). "Eliphaz" is an Edomite name (Gen. 36:4, 11), possibly meaning "My God Is Fine Gold."³ He was probably either from Teman in Edom (cf. Jer. 49:7; Obad. 9) or from Tema in Arabia. Bildad ("Son of Contention"⁴) may have been a relative of Shuah, Abraham's youngest son (Gen. 25:2). Zophar ("To Twitter"⁵) may have come from Naamah, a Judean town (Josh. 15:41), if it existed then. Another view is that "Zophar" is a variant form of "Zepho," who was a descendant of Esau (Gen. 36:11).

"It is perhaps significant that this book that portrays a debate of the wise [cf. Jer. 49:7; Obad. 8] is set in an Edomite location, that is to say, just outside Israel, in order not to be

¹Ibid., 3:74.

²Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:379.

³Gaebelein, 2:1:139.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

distracted by Israelite distinctives, but just next-door to Israel because it is an Israelite audience that is being addressed."¹

"Sufferers attract fixers the way roadkills attract vultures."²

Evidently the disfigurement that resulted from Job's illness prevented Job's acquaintances from recognizing him and led to their extreme grief that they manifested in ways common in their culture. Throwing dust over one's head signified identifying with the dead.³

The writer did not explain why they did not speak to him for seven days. This may have been traditional, or they may have spoken to no one out of respect for him. A week was the usual time of mourning for the dead (cf. Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13; Sir. 22:12), so they may have been mourning for him as one already dead. Perhaps they discussed his condition among themselves but did not do so with him. Apparently they waited for him to speak first (ch. 3) before they addressed him directly, as was presumably customary and respectful.

"For one of them to speak prior to the sufferer would have been in bad taste."⁴

In any case, their commitment to him, as seen in their patient waiting to address him, shows their genuine friendship. How many friends do you have that would travel a long distance to visit you in an illness and sit with you silently for seven days out of respect for your pain?

"In overwhelming sorrows, true friendship almost invariably demonstrates itself more perfectly by silence than by speech. And even in spite of the fact that Job's friends caused him sorrow by their words, they are more to be admired because what they thought concerning him they dared to say to him, rather than *about* him to others."⁵

¹Clines, p. 59.

²Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, p. 632.

³Clines, p. 35.

⁴Elmer B. Smick, "Job," in *1 Kings-Job*, vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 887.

⁵G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 202.

"Don't try to explain everything; explanations never heal a broken heart. If his friends had listened to him, accepted his feelings, and not argued with him, they would have helped him greatly; but they chose to be prosecuting attorneys instead of witnesses."¹

The prologue of the book (chs. 1—2) sets the stage for what follows by informing us, the readers, that Job's suffering was not due to his sins. None of the characters in the story knew this fact except God and Satan. We also see the heavenly dimension and the spiritual warfare taking place—that were also unknown to the human characters in this drama.

II. THE DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE BASIS OF THE DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP 3:1—42:6

This major part of the book begins with a personal lament in which Job expressed his agony (ch. 3). Three cycles of speeches follow in which Job's friends dialogued with him about his condition (chs. 4—27). Job then voiced his despair in two soliloquies (chs. 28—31). Next Job's fourth friend, Elihu, offered his solution to Job's problem (chs. 32—37). The section closes with God speaking to Job twice and Job's responses (chs. 38:1—42:6).

A. JOB'S PERSONAL LAMENT CH. 3

The poetic body to the book begins with a soliloquy in which Job cursed the day of his birth. This introductory soliloquy corresponds to another one Job gave at the end of his dialogue with his three friends (chs. 29—31)—especially chapter 31, in which he uttered another curse against himself. These two soliloquies bracket the three cycles of speeches like the covers of a book and bind them together into a unified whole.

Evidently the passing of time brought Job no relief but only continued the irritation of his persisting pain. In chapter 2, Job restrained his words and manifested a submissive attitude. In chapter 3, his statements are assertive and angry. In this individual lament Job articulated a death wish.

¹Wiersbe, p. 14.

He actually expressed three wishes. Another way to divide chapter 3 is: Job's curse (vv. 3-13) and his lament (vv. 14-26).¹

1. The wish that he had not been born 3:1-10

Job broke the silence by cursing the day of his birth (v. 1; cf. Jer. 20:14-20). Job evidently considered his conception as the beginning of his existence (v. 3; cf. Ps. 139:13-16). His poetic description of his birth expressed his regret that he had left his mother's womb alive (cf. Jer. 15:10; 20:14-18).

"Leviathan [v. 8] was a seven-headed sea monster of ancient Near Eastern mythology. In the Ugaritic literature of Canaan and Phoenicia, eclipses were said to be caused by Leviathan's swallowing the sun and moon. Job said, 'Let thou curse it [the night of my conception] who curse the day, who are prepared to arouse Leviathan.' He was referring to a custom of sorcerers or enchanters, who claimed to have the power to make a day unfortunate by rousing the dragon asleep in the sea and inciting it to swallow the sun or moon. Thus, if the daytime or nighttime luminary were gone, Job's birthday would, in a sense, be missing. Was Job indicating belief in a creature of mythology? No, he was probably doing nothing more than utilizing for poetic purposes a common notion that his hearers would understand. This would have been similar to modern adults' referring to Santa Claus. Mentioning his name does not mean that one believes such a person exists."²

Job wanted to express in many ways his regret that he had been born.

"... it is better never to have been born, or to be annihilated, than to be rejected of God (comp. Matt. xxvi. 24 ...)."³

Evidently the reason Job longed for nonexistence was his failure to understand his relationship with God and his place in the universe. Job had

¹Hartley, p. 88.

²Zuck, *Job*, p. 24. Cf. 41:1; Ps. 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1. For fuller discussion of the Canaanite mythology involving Leviathan, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, pp. 329-31; Smick, "Job," pp. 863-71.

³Delitzsch, 1:84.

many questions about the creation order. He seems to have realized that understanding his relationship to God and his place in creation required an understanding of creation. In clarifying Job's relationships, Elihu and God also said much about creation. This appears to be the reason the creation motif is so prevalent in the Book of Job.¹ An understanding of creation is indeed essential to our correct understanding of who we are and what our relationship to God is (Gen. 1—2). This is one reason people need to understand the Genesis record of creation accurately.²

2. The wish that he had died at birth 3:11-19

Another acceptable alternative to Job was that he had been stillborn, miscarried, or died immediately after birth. All the past joys in his life could not compensate for the present misery he felt. The rest of death was better than the turmoil of life for him now that he was suffering.

3. The wish that he could die then 3:20-26

Much of Job's suffering was intellectual. He asked, "Why?" frequently in this soliloquy (vv. 11, 12, 20, 23) and in the dialogue that follows (7:20, 21; 9:29; 13:24; 21:4; 24:1).

"My groaning comes at the sight of my food" (v. 24) may mean that food was not appealing to him. Probably he also meant that his groaning was as regular and frequent as his meals. The parallel idea at the end of verse 24 means his pain was as unending as a stream.

This is how Job felt when he uttered this soliloquy: He was bitter (v. 20) but not out of control. He was angry with God (v. 23) but not cursing God. The writer used the same Hebrew word to describe Job as one "shut off" by God, with darkness and disfavor (v. 23), that Satan used to describe

¹For further discussion of the creation motif, see Parsons, pp. 145-47; Leo G. Perdue, "Job's Assault on Creation," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):295-315; Ángel M. Rodríguez, "Genesis and Creation in the Wisdom Literature," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, pp. 226-41.

²Three fine organizations that provide books, pamphlets, audio tapes, videos, seminar speakers, etc. for all ages to this end are: The Institute for Creation Research, 10946 Woodside Avenue North, Santee, CA 92071; Answers in Genesis, P.O. Box 6330, Florence, KY 41022; and Creation Science Foundation, P.O. Box 6302, Acacia Ridge DC, QLD 4110, Australia.

Job as one whom God had "made a fence around" to protect him from evil (1:10). Job was in despair but not defiant toward God. He was feeling his pain intensely but not accusing God of being unjust. His grief had not yet descended to its lowest depths.

Many people reach the same level in the strata of grief that Job did here. They long to die but do not contemplate suicide. Job evidently did not entertain the option of suicide because suicide implied that one had lost all hope in God.¹ The pressure of pain squeezes out the memories of past pleasures. The present agony becomes so overwhelming that sufferers often cannot see hope beyond it. My own father suffered with bone cancer and before he died longed for death, even though he was a godly believer. This experience of great pain is the will of God for some people.

"Pain humbles the proud. It softens the stubborn. It melts the hard. Silently and relentlessly, it wins battles deep within the lonely soul."²

We must not make the mistake of misjudging those who are going through this "valley of the shadow of death"—as Job's friends did.

"These are the harshest words Job utters against himself in the entire book."³

B. THE FIRST CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND HIS THREE FRIENDS **CHS. 4—14**

The two soliloquies of Job (chs. 3 and 29—31) enclose three cycles of dialogue between Job and his three friends. Each cycle consists of speeches by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, in that order, interspersed with Job's reply to each address. This pattern continues through the first two cycles of speeches (chs. 4—14 and 15—21) but breaks down in the third when Zophar failed to continue the dialogue.

¹Hartley, p. 92.

²Charles R. Swindoll, *Come before Winter*, p. 151.

³Hartley, p. 101.

"Now the discussion begins. Soon it will become a debate, then a dispute; and the Lord will have to intervene to bring matters to a head."¹

"There are two basic lines of interaction which run through Job—Job's crying out to God and Job's disputations with his three friends. The absence of the third speech of Zophar is consistent with the fact that each of the speeches of the three friends is progressively shorter in each cycle and that Job's responses to each of the friends (which also are progressively shorter) are longer than the corresponding speech of the friends. This seems to signify Job's verbal victory over Zophar and the other two friends. It is also indicative of the bankruptcy and futility of dialogue when both Job and the three friends assume the retribution dogma (which for the friends implies Job's guilt and for Job implies God's injustice). Consequently, this structural design marks a very gradual swing toward a focus on Job's relationship and interaction with God in contrast to the earlier primary interaction between Job and his friends."²

Throughout the three cycles of speeches, Job's friends did not change their position. They believed that God rewards the righteous and punishes sinners in this life: the theory of retribution.³ They reasoned that all suffering is punishment for sin, and since Job was suffering, he was a sinner. They believed that what people experience depends on what they have done (cf. John 9:2). While this is true often, it is not the fundamental reason we experience what we do in life, as the Book of Job proceeds to reveal.

"At the heart of the debate between Job and his three friends is a question, Who is wise? Who has the correct insight into Job's suffering? Both Job and the friends set themselves up as sources of wisdom and ridicule the wisdom of the other

¹Wiersbe, p. 15. Cf. Hartley, pp. 38, 42.

²Parsons, p. 140.

³See Sarles, pp. 329-52.

(11:12; 12:1-3, 12; 13:12; 15:1-13). As we will see, this question, 'Who is wise?' dominates the whole book."¹

As the speeches unfolded, Job's friends became increasingly vitriolic and specific about Job's guilt. This was true of Eliphaz (cf. 5:8; ch. 15; 22:5-9), Bildad (cf. 8:6; ch. 18; 25:5-6), and Zophar (cf. 11:14; ch. 20). However, they started out in a most conciliatory manner.

In several of his speeches, Job affirmed his innocence of great sin (6:10; 9:21; 16:17; 27:6). In his first five responses he charged God with afflicting him (6:4; 9:17; 13:27; 16:12; 19:11). In each of his first three replies in the first cycle he asked, "Why?" (7:20; 10:2; 13:24). In six of his speeches he longed to present his case to God (9:3; 13:3; 16:21; 19:23; 23:4; 31:35).

Job's friends each emphasized a different aspect of God's character, though they all saw Him as a judge. Eliphaz pointed out the distance between God and man, His transcendence (4:17-19; 15:14-16), and stressed God's punishment of the wicked (5:12-14). Bildad said God is just (8:3), great (25:2-3), and that He punishes only the wicked (18:5-21). God's inscrutability impressed Zophar (11:7), who also stated that God punishes the wicked quickly (20:23).

Eliphaz spoke to Job with the most respect and restraint, Bildad was more direct and less courteous, and Zophar was the most blunt and brutal. Eliphaz based his arguments on experience (4:8; 5:3; 15:17), Bildad on tradition (8:8-10), and Zophar on mere assumption or intuition (20:1-5). Eliphaz viewed life as a mystic, Bildad as an attorney, and Zophar as a dogmatist. Bildad and Zophar picked up themes from Eliphaz's speeches and echoed them with slightly variant emphases (cf. 5:9 and 22:12 with 8:3, 5; 22:2a with 11:7, 11; 15:32-34 with 18:16 and 20:21-22; and 5:14 with 18:5, 6, 18 and 20:26).

"A consideration of the dramatic framework of the book of Job offers great insight into the book's message. The author penetrates deeply into the issue of human suffering by setting up many sharp contrasts. The interplay of these contrasts

¹Longman and Dillard, p. 229.

gives dramatic movement to the story. The basic tension is between one's belief in God and one's personal experience."¹

1. Eliphaz's first speech chs. 4—5

Eliphaz's first speech has a symmetrical, introverted (chiastic) structure that emphasizes the central section:

- "A Opening remark (4:2)
- B Exhortation (4:3-6)
- C God's dealings with men (4:7-11)
- D The revelation of truth (4:12-21)
- C' God's dealings with men (5:1-16)
- B' Exhortation (5:17-26)
- A' Closing remark (5:27)"²

Eliphaz's rebuke of Job 4:1-6

Eliphaz began courteously but moved quickly to criticism. He commended Job for having encouraged others in the past, but rebuked him for not encouraging himself in the present. He did not offer encouragement to his distressed friend, though he intended to by what he said. It is unclear whether verse 6 is an ironic rebuke or a subtle reminder.

Eliphaz's view of suffering 4:7-11

Verse 7 is one of the clearest expressions of Eliphaz's view of why people suffer and his view of the basis for the divine-human relationship. He believed good people always win and the bad always lose. He was asserting that Job's sins were finding him out.

Most of the commentators believed that Eliphaz held that Job was guilty of some sins, but David Clines interpreted Eliphaz's words a bit differently:

¹Hartley, p. 43. Paragraph division omitted.

²Andersen, p. 111.

"Eliphaz ... starts from the assumption that the innocent never suffer permanently ... [v. 7]. For him Job is essentially one of the innocent, so whatever wrong Job has done must be comparatively trivial, and so too his suffering is bound to be soon over ... [v. 6]."¹

Bildad and Zophar shared the basic conclusion that Job was suffering because of some sin, but experience does not support it, as Job pointed out later. Eliphaz also explained the basis for his arguments: personal experience (v. 8). Unfortunately, any one person's individual experience is too limited to provide enough data with which to answer the great questions Job and his friends discussed.

Eliphaz's comments about lions (vv. 10-11) may be an oblique reference to Job, his wife, and his children.²

Eliphaz's vision 4:12-21

Eliphaz's authority was a vision he had seen (v. 12). It seems that his vision was not a revelation from God for the following reasons: He did not say that it was from the LORD. God normally identified revelations from Himself as such, to those who received them, when He used this method of revelation. Furthermore, the content of what Eliphaz received in the vision (vv. 17-21) does not represent God as He has revealed Himself elsewhere in Scripture. Specifically, God appears here as unconcerned with people.

Evidently Eliphaz's "spirit" (v. 15) was not the Holy Spirit, and the Hebrew word translated "spirit" never unambiguously describes a disembodied spirit. Perhaps the spirit was an evil angel. What he heard from this spirit contained elements of truth: man cannot make himself pure before God, and man is mortal. Still, Eliphaz was wrong in applying these words to Job as though Job was a willful sinner (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3).³

"The chief thought of the oracle was that God is the absolutely just One, and infinitely exalted above men and angels."⁴

¹Clines, p. xl.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 366.

³See James L. Crenshaw, "The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature," *Word & World* 7:3 (Summer 1986):251.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:97.

Elihu's point was that though the distinction between the righteous and the wicked is firm, the righteous are never perfectly righteous, so they must expect to experience, to some extent, the misfortunes of the wicked.¹

Eliphaz's counsel to Job 5:1-16

"Job had told his wife she spoke as the foolish women; now Eliphaz tells him he acted as the foolish men, the silly ones."²

Job's friend did not deny that the wicked fool (cf. Ps. 14:1) prospers temporarily (v. 3), but he believed that before a person dies, God will punish him for his sins. Jesus disagreed (Luke 13:4). The well-known comparison in verse 7 ("For man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward") is true to an extent, but Eliphaz was again wrong in connecting this truth with the reason for Job's suffering. People certainly do experience trouble in life as surely as sparks ascend from an open fire.³

"What God did in Job's case, Eliphaz implied, was to bring suffering into his life as a wake-up call, an alarm to help him come to grips with the reality of his sin."⁴

"Most people will agree that *ultimately* God blesses the righteous, His own people, and judges the wicked; but that is not the question discussed in Job. It is not the *ultimate* but the *immediate* about which Job and his three friends are concerned, and not only they but also David (Ps. 37), Asaph (Ps. 73), and even the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 12:1-6)."⁵

Eliphaz's counsel to seek God and be restored was partially good. Job would do well to appeal to God, but not for the reason Eliphaz assumed. Eliphaz also believed God was disciplining Job for sins that he had committed (v. 17). Job's suffering did have a refining effect and caused him to grow personally, but that was not God's primary purpose in allowing Satan to afflict him, as is clear from 1:6—2:10. Job was not the first or the last

¹Clines, p. 128.

²Henry, p. 522.

³For a synthesis of God's revelation about man in the Book of Job, see Zuck, "A Theology ...," pp. 226-31.

⁴Merrill, p. 380.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 17.

person to find it difficult to rejoice that he was experiencing the LORD's reproofs. Eliphaz's oblique advice to do so was ineffective.

"Eliphaz as a counselor is a supreme negative example. Great truths misapplied only hurt more those who are already hurting."¹

"You do not heal a broken heart with logic; you heal a broken heart with love."²

Eliphaz's reminder of God's blessings 5:17-27

Eliphaz concluded his speech by urging Job to repent of his sin. Since God was good, He would then bless Job, who could then die prosperous and happy (cf. Deut. 32:39).

"Unfortunately, and obviously without realizing it, Eliphaz sides with the Satan against God in offering this counsel, for he seeks to motivate Job to serve God for the benefits that piety brings."³

There are several parallel references to the thoughts expressed in this section (cf. v. 20 and Isa. 28:15; v. 23 and Hos. 2:20; and v. 25 and Ps. 72:16). Eliphaz's final statement reveals smug self-satisfaction (v. 27).

In this speech, Eliphaz said that Job's suffering was a result of his sin. He asserted that sin is part of the human condition and that it brings retribution and discipline from God. He also called on Job to repent, with the promise that God would then bless him. However, he falsely assumed that Job had sinned greatly or deliberately rebelled against God.

Eliphaz failed to distinguish the different reasons for suffering. The ungodly suffer as punishment for their sins. The godly suffer for at least three reasons: (1) to sanctify them from sin, (2) to prove their fidelity to God, and (3) to bear faithful testimony to Him.⁴

"Without a knowledge of these different kinds of human suffering, the book of Job cannot be understood. ... Just the

¹Smick, "Job," p. 896.

²Wiersbe, p. 17.

³Hartley, p. 129.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:105-7.

want of this spiritual discernment and inability to distinguish the different kinds of suffering is the mistake of the friends, and likewise, from the very first, the mistake of Eliphaz."¹

We should learn from this speech not to judge another person's relationship with God by what they may be experiencing, be it adversity or tranquility.

"But the speech of Eliphaz, moreover, beautiful and true as it is, when considered in itself, is nevertheless heartless, haughty, stiff, and cold. For (1.) it does not contain a word of sympathy, and yet the suffering which he beholds is so terribly great: his first word to his friend after the seven days of painful silence is not one of comfort, but of moralizing. (2.) He must know that Job's disease is not the first and only suffering which has come upon him, and that he has endured his previous afflictions with heroic submission; but he ignores this, and acts as though sorrow were now first come upon Job. (3.) Instead of recognizing therein the reason of Job's despondency, that he thinks that he has fallen from the love of God, and become an object of wrath, he treats him as self-righteous; and to excite his feelings, presents an oracle to him, which contains nothing but what Job might sincerely admit as true. (4.) Instead of considering that Job's despair and murmuring against God is really of a different kind from that of the godless, he classes them together, and instead of gently correcting him, presents to Job the accursed end of the fool, who also murmurs against God, as he has himself seen it."²

2. Job's first reply to Eliphaz chs. 6—7

Job began, not with a direct reply to Eliphaz, but with another complaint about his condition. Then he responded to Eliphaz's speech but addressed all three of his friends. The "you" and "yours" in 6:24-30 are plural in the Hebrew text.

"It has been truly observed that Job's speeches, in their deepest utterances, are not so much an answer to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar as the wail of a desolate soul to a God who

¹Ibid., 1:107-8.

²Ibid., 1:108-9. Cf. Clines, p. 154.

could not be found, from a self which could not be escaped, and an anguish which could not be explained."¹

"In every one of his eleven speeches he [Job] adopts a different posture, psychologically and theologically. In the end he admits that he has nothing to rely upon, not even God—nothing except his conviction of his own innocence."²

Job's reason for complaining 6:1-7

The Hebrew word translated "disaster" in verse 2 occurs only here in the Old Testament. We could translate it "calamity" or "misfortune." Job said he complained because of his great irritation. His calamities were as heavy as wet sand (vv. 2-3). Job implied that his words of complaint were nothing in comparison to his suffering. His situation was harder for him to bear because he believed his misfortune came from God. This is the first time that Job named God as the ultimate cause of his suffering.

"The God he had known and the God he now experiences seemed irreconcilable."³

The hardest thing about Job's suffering seems to have been that God had become his enemy (v. 4). Job refused to accept his trials without something to make them bearable, namely, complaining. Similarly a person refuses tasteless food without salt (vv. 6-7).

Job's desperate condition 6:8-13

Job longed for death. He wished God would release him from his enslavement to life (cf. Ps. 105:20) and snip off his life as a weaver cuts thread (v. 9). If only God would do *something!*

"Life is like a weaving, and only God can see the total pattern and when the work is finished."⁴

¹Baxter, 3:75.

²Clines, p. xlii.

³Rowley, p. 58.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 20.

"If Job had not had a good conscience, he could not have spoken with this assurance of comfort on the other side death."¹

Job affirmed his faithfulness to God's words (v. 10) but acknowledged that he had no hope and no help to live. Some English translations of verse 13 read as an affirmation, rather than as a question, for example: "In truth I have no help ... " (NRSV) or "Since I cannot help myself ... " (HCSB).² Many, however, translate this verse as a question.

"The fact that Job speaks about God in the third person should not be permitted to give the wrong impression. He is actually praying, not talking to Eliphaz. Such a convention is common in the respectful address to a superior."³

Job's disappointment with his friends 6:14-23

"If, up to this point, Job has been praying, or at least soliloquizing, now he makes a more direct attack on the friends (the 'you' in verse 21 is plural)."⁴

"Eliphaz has attacked Job's complaint; Job now attacks Eliphaz' 'consolation.'"⁵

Job's friends had not been loyal to him, when they judged him as they had. "Kindness" in verse 14 is literally "loyalty." Consequently, Job was close to forsaking his fear of God. Job's friends should have encouraged and supported him. Instead they proved as disappointing as a wadi. A wadi is a streambed that is full of water in the rainy season, but when the heat of summer comes, it dries up completely. Job's point was that his friends were no help in his distress.

¹Henry, pp. 524-25.

²NRSV stands for *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 1989; and HCSB stands for *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible*, 2004. See also NEB (*The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*) and CEV (*The Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version*).

³Andersen, p. 129.

⁴Ibid., p. 130.

⁵Kline, p. 468.

Evidently, Job's friends were afraid of him (v. 21) in the sense that they feared that if they comforted him, God would view them as approving of his sin and would punish them as well.¹

"Verse 21 is the climax of Job's reaction to his friends' counsel [thus far]. They offered no help."²

"There is no act of pastoral care more unnerving than trying to say the right thing to someone hysterical with grief. It is early in the day for Job to lose patience with them. But the point is not whether Job is unfair: this is how he feels. The truth is already in sight that only God can speak the right word. And Job's wits are sharp enough to forecast where Eliphaz's trend of thought will end—in open accusation of sin. Hence he gets in first with a pre-emptive strike, anticipating in the following denials his great speech of exculpation in chapter 31."³

Job's invitation to his friends 6:24-30

Next, Job invited his friends to identify the sin for which they believed God was punishing him.⁴ So far Eliphaz had only alluded to it. Job welcomed specific honest criticism, not arguments based on insinuations (v. 25). In verse 30, Job seems to be claiming the ability to know whether his afflictions were the result of sin or not, as a person can distinguish different tastes in his or her mouth.

Job's miserable suffering 7:1-6

"The rest of Job's speech is more like a soliloquy which turns into a remonstrance against God Himself. His theme is once more the *hard service* that men have *upon earth*."⁵

"That Job speaks realistically about his pains here, in contrast to the unrealistic wish never to have been born that he uttered

¹Rowley, pp. 73-74. Cf. Andrew Blackwood Jr., *A Devotional Introduction to Job*, p. 65.

²Smick, "Job," p. 901.

³Andersen, p. 133.

⁴See Westermann, pp. 97-99, for a discussion of Job's claim of innocence.

⁵Andersen, p. 134.

in his curse-lament (ch. 3), means that he is beginning to cope with his real situation."¹

Verse 3 implies that Job's misery had been going on for some time before his friends visited him.² In this complaint (cf. ch. 3; 6:8-13), Job compared himself to a slave or hired servant, and concluded that he was in a worse condition. In verse 6, one Hebrew word occurs twice and reads, in most English translations, first "shuttle" and then "hope." Job had run out of hope as a weaver's shuttle runs out of thread.

Job's prayer to God 7:7-21

Throughout his sufferings, Job did not turn away from God. Often people undergoing severe affliction do forsake Him. However, Job kept God in view and kept talking to God, even though he did not know what to ask, which was a major part of his torment. I believe this accounts for his ability to maintain his sanity and to come through his adversity finally. It is when people abandon God in their suffering that they get into serious trouble spiritually.

Job believed he would die soon. Yet he did not ask to die here, as he had earlier (3:20-22). This slight upturn in his feelings may be the result of his praying to God.³ Sheol (v. 9) refers to the grave in the Old Testament. The ancients thought of it as the place where the spirits of people went when they died. Their condition there was a mystery in the patriarchal period.⁴

"... Job knows nothing of a resurrection of the dead, and what one knows not, one cannot deny. He knows only that after death, the end of the present life, there is no second life in this world, only a being in *Sheol*, which is only an apparent existence = no existence, in which all praise of God is silent ..."⁵

Since his friends could not identify his sin, Job asked God why he was suffering (vv. 11-21). In this prayer Job complained that God would not

¹Hartley, p. 142.

²Delitzsch, 1:120.

³Carter, 2:65.

⁴See H. C. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973):1-54.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:130.

leave him alone so that he could die. Job felt that God was hounding him for no apparent reason.

God would not let Job alone long enough for him even to swallow his saliva (v. 19), a proverbial expression meaning "for a moment."¹ He asked God to point out his sin, if he had sinned (v. 20; cf. 6:24). Job believed he had done nothing worthy of such suffering (v. 21).

"I would suggest that the imagery of Job 7:12 ... has been chosen by the poet to articulate precisely the main thrust of Job's protest against God (i.e., the deity's relentless surveillance), and in doing so the poet has created a text with clear mythologized content but without a strict parallel ... he has molded general mythological ideas to suit his own purpose."²

"The mythical figures here mentioned [v. 12], Sea (Yam) and the Dragon (Tannin) are identified by the older commentators with the sea-monster of Babylonian myth, Tiamat, whose defeat by Marduk is recounted in the creation epic *Enuma elish* (ANET, 60-72 [67]). ... These hostile forces, though soundly defeated by God in primordial times, are nevertheless sometimes viewed in the OT as still in existence though safely under control by God."³

Some people are afraid to pray frankly and honestly to God, but Job had nothing to hide. He was open to God's correction even though he believed God was dealing with him unjustly. In this, his prayer of complaint is a model for us readers. God understood Job's chafed feelings and did not "kick him when he was down" for his bitter words.

I think Job reacted with hostility toward Eliphaz partly because of the way his friend tried to comfort him. Eliphaz assumed a position of having

¹Ibid., 1:125.

²David A. Diewert, "Job 7:12: *Yam, tannin* and the surveillance of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:2 (1987):215. See also Elmer B. Smick, "Mythology and the Book of Job," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (Spring 1970):101-8; idem, "Another Look at the Mythological Elements in the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978):213-28.

³Clines, p. 189. Paragraph divisions omitted. ANET is *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard.

superior knowledge based on his personal experience. He forced Job into the mold of being a great sinner to keep his theory of retribution intact. Job did not appreciate being put down or made to look like a greater sinner than he was. He had formerly held Eliphaz's theory, but now he believed that it was not always true.

Job's was a common reaction to counsel that comes from someone who claims greater experience, either direct or vicarious—even experience derived from Scripture. This approach often produces an overreaction. Job refused to admit that he was a sinner at all, though later he did admit it. Such an approach also offends people who have considerable experience in life. Eliphaz had no reason to be surprised when the person he was trying to help rebuked him.

"We should nevertheless be mistaken if we thought there were sin here in the expressions by which Job describes God's hostility against himself. ... But the sin is that he dwells upon these doubting questions, and thus attributes apparent mercilessness and injustice to God."¹

3. Bildad's first speech ch. 8

Bildad agreed with Eliphaz that God was paying Job back for some sin he had committed, and he believed God would show Job mercy if he confessed that sin. However, Bildad built his conclusions on a slightly different foundation. Eliphaz argued from his own personal experience and observations (4:8, 12-21; 5:3) and those of his contemporaries (5:27). Bildad cited a more reliable authority: the experience of past generations that had come down through years of tradition (8:8-10). He was a traditionalist whereas Eliphaz was an existentialist.

The justice of God 8:1-7

Bildad's initial words contrast with Eliphaz's. Whereas Eliphaz was gentle and indirect, Bildad was impatient and insensitive. He accused Job of being a blow-hard (v. 2).

"Bildad is objective and analytical in his speech about God and man. As a result he is a neat but superficial thinker. He is a

¹Delitzsch, 1:131, 132.

moralist, and in his simple theology everything can be explained in terms of two kinds of men—the blameless (*tam*, verse 20a; used of Job in 1:1) and the secretly wicked (*hanep*, verse 13b). Outwardly the same, God distinguishes them by prospering the one and destroying the other."¹

Bildad's callous reference to the death of Job's children (v. 4) amounts to: "They got just what they deserved!" His point was that if Job was not sinning, God would be unjust in allowing him to suffer calamities (v. 6).

"The very fact that Job still lives is proof that he is not a gross sinner, like his children. However serious his suffering, it is not as bad as it might be; therefore his sin is not as serious as he may fear."²

Bildad asserted that God does not punish righteousness (vv. 6, 20). He erroneously assumed his basic premise that all suffering is punishment for sin, which is the retributive dogma.

"Obviously the friends' theology was far more important than Job."³

The evidence from history 8:8-10

Bildad's authority for his view comes out clearly in this section. The viewpoint Eliphaz and he espoused had the backing of many authorities from the past. Theirs was not some new theory but one that had generations of support in their educational system. Bildad would have loved the song "Tradition!" from *Fiddler on the Roof*.

"Bildad's position is that what is true is not new, and what is new is not true."⁴

Still, many heresies have long and impressive pedigrees.

¹Andersen, p. 140.

²Clines, p. xl.

³Bullock, p. 34.

⁴S. R. Driver and G. B. Grey, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 78.

Illustrations of Job's godlessness 8:11-19

The illustration of the water plant (vv. 11-13) emphasized the fact that in Bildad's view, Job had abandoned God, the source of his blessing (cf. 1:1, 8). Bildad advised his friend not to forget God. The spider's web analogy (vv. 14-15) implied that Job was depending on his possessions rather than God for his security. The allusion to the garden plant (vv. 16-19) compared Job to an uprooted bush that others would replace.

The possibility of blessing 8:20-22

By reminding Job of God's integrity, Bildad hoped to appeal to his friend to repent. Bildad assured him that if he did, God would restore him.

"Bildad's assertion that *God will not reject a blameless man* (20a) makes him the precursor of those who mocked Jesus with the same logic: 'He trusts in God; let God deliver him' (Mt. 27:43). Job has a lesser Calvary, and each person has his own. But when we know about God's rejection of Jesus, our dereliction can never again be as dark as Job's."¹

Even though Bildad took a more humble basis for his view than Eliphaz did, his arguments failed to move Job. His theory, time-honored as it was, did not harmonize with Job's experience.

"Herein is Bildad's mistake, that he thinks his commonplace utterances sufficient to explain all the mysteries of human life."²

"With the same icy and unfeeling rigorism with which Calvinism refers the divine rule, and all that happens upon earth, to the one principle of absolute divine will and pleasure, in spite of all the contradictions of Scripture and experience, Bildad refers everything to the principle of the divine justice, and, indeed, divine justice in a judicial sense."³

¹Andersen, pp. 142-43.

²Delitzsch, 1:141. See also E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 302.

³Delitzsch, 1:143.

"God does not *punish* His own; and when He *chastises* them, it is not an act of His retributive *justice*, but of His disciplinary *love*."¹

People with problems get little help from rigid, closed-minded Bildads, who refuse to reevaluate their theories in the light of new evidence, but simply reaffirm traditional answers. We must always stay open to new evidence, new insights, and the possibility that not only we ourselves, but those we follow, may have interpreted the facts incorrectly.

"Bildad's speech contains an important negative lesson about human nature in general and about the qualities of a good counselor. He heard Job's words with his ears, but his heart heard nothing."²

4. Job's first reply to Bildad chs. 9—10

"... the most significant feature of this speech is that Job has shifted, temporarily at least, out of his preoccupation with sheer suffering, away from his life-denial and his overwhelming sense of bitter disappointment, to ventilate the question of his vindication."³

"From this point on, the emphasis in the discussion is on *the justice of God*; and the image that is uppermost in Job's mind is that of *a legal trial*."⁴

The greatness of God 9:1-12

Job began his response to Bildad by acknowledging that much of what his friends had said was true (v. 2): God does not pervert what is true. Many of Job's speeches began with sarcasm or irony. Job then turned to a question that Eliphaz had raised earlier (4:17) that seems to have stuck in Job's mind. How could he, a righteous man, much less the ungodly, stand righteous before God, as Eliphaz had urged him to do (5:8), since God was

¹Ibid., 1:144. Italics added for emphasis.

²Smick, "Job," p. 905.

³Clines, p. 225.

⁴Wiersbe, pp. 22-23.

tormenting him. God appeared to Job to be acting arbitrarily and capriciously. How can anyone be right before such a God?

"This is not a question about salvation ('How may I be justified?') but about vindication ('How can I be declared innocent?')."1

"Job's first address to Bildad was a magnificent confession of the sovereignty of God. ... Yet Job's recognition of God's sovereignty is more fatalistic than grounded in the nature of God as a just and righteous One."2

Because God is who He is, Job recognized that man cannot go into court against God and win (cf. 40:1-5; 42:2). It would be useless to try for four reasons:

1. If I disputed with Him, I could not answer Him, because He is so mighty (9:3-14).

2. If God did respond to my cry, I do not think He would be listening, because He is against me (9:15-19).

3. If I am righteous, He will declare me guilty, because He destroys both the innocent and the wicked (9:20-24).

4. If I try to forget my problems or even confess my sins, He would still consider me guilty (9:25-32)."³

"In an ancient court the winner often was the one who argued his position so convincingly and refuted his opponent so persuasively that he reduced him to silence. A second way of deciding a dispute was for the two contestants to engage in a wrestling match.⁴ The winner of the match proved the merits of his position and received a settlement to his advantage. While the preponderance of legal language indicates that Job is thinking of a court trial, the references to God's strength

¹Ibid., p. 23.

²Merrill, p. 382.

³Zuck, *Job*, p. 47.

⁴Cf. Cyrus Gordon, "Belt-Wrestling in the Bible World," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23 (1950-51):131-36.

and to his cosmic victory over Rahab's cohorts in v. 13 indicate that the latter type of contest is also in his mind."¹

Job concluded that God was unjust, because He cut off both the guilty and the guiltless. Job's concept of God was becoming fuzzy, because God did not seem to him to be acting in ways that were consistent with Job's limited understanding of Him. We have the same problem. We need to get our concept of God from Scripture, which gives us the fullest, most balanced view of God possible for us now.

The Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades (v. 9) are constellations of stars.

The arbitrary actions of God 9:13-24

Rahab (lit. pride, v. 13) was a name ancient Near Easterners used to describe a mythical sea monster that was symbolic of evil. Such a monster, also called Leviathan (7:12), was a major character in the creation legends of several ancient Near Eastern peoples, including the Mesopotamians and the Canaanites. The Israelites also referred to Egypt as Rahab because of its similarity to this monster (cf. 26:12; Ps. 87:4; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9).

"Far from being arrogant, Job is subdued, even to the point of self-loathing (verse 21b)."²

Job came to the point of concluding that it did not matter whether he was innocent since God destroys both the guiltless, like himself, and the wicked (v. 22). He came very close to accusing God of injustice here. Further evidences of God's injustice include the facts that innocent people die in plagues (v. 23) and the wicked prosper in the earth (v. 24). These accusations are untrue, and Delitzsch regarded them as sinful.³

"... in Exod. 23:8 bribery is condemned because it covers the eyes of officials so that they cannot see where justice lies. Job here says it is God who blinds the judges to the truth. All the injustice that prevails in the world is laid at his door."⁴

¹Hartley, p. 167.

²Andersen, p. 148.

³Delitzsch, 1:251.

⁴Rowley, pp. 80-81.

Job rebutted his friends' contention, that God consistently blesses the good and blasts the evil, with examples that he drew from life generally, not just from his own experiences.¹ In this he showed sensitivity to Bildad's respect for tradition.

"The friends had condemned Job that God might be righteous—according to their standard. Job, defending himself against their unjustified insinuations, is driven to condemn God that he himself might be righteous (cf. 40:8)."²

The unfairness of God 9:25-35

In short, Job believed it was useless for him to try to prove himself upright, since God seemed determined to punish him.

"It is important to notice that Job does not speak of God without at the same time looking up to Him as in prayer [cf. vv. 28, 31]. Although he feels rejected of God, he still remains true to God."³

Job's speeches characteristically moved from monologue, or addressing his friends, to addressing to God.

The Book of Job uses legal terms and metaphors extensively in the sections that deal with Job's disputes with God. Job had previously served as a judge in his town (29:7-17), and he wanted justice (Heb. *mispat*) from God.⁴ Therefore he used legal terminology frequently in his dialogues. These legal metaphors are one of the key features of the book, since they help us identify its purpose.⁵

Job's frustration, expressed in verses 32-33, is understandable since God was both his legal adversary and his judge. This accounts for his urgent, yet hopeless, cry for a neutral party (mediator, umpire) to arbitrate a settlement between himself and God. In the ancient Near East this arbitrator was a judge whose verdict was more often a settlement proposal

¹See James L. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82:3 (1970):380-95.

²Kline, p. 470.

³Delitzsch, 1:160.

⁴See Sylvia H. Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mispat* in the Book of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):521-29.

⁵Parsons, pp. 147-50.

that the litigants could either accept or reject (cf. 13:7-12; 16:18-21).¹ Job had no hope of receiving justice from God—only mercy (v. 34). He felt that since God was so great, he could not vindicate himself.

"This is the persistent problem, the real problem of the book: not the problem of suffering, to be solved intellectually by supplying a satisfactory answer which explains why it happened; but the attainment of a right relationship with God which makes existence in suffering holy and acceptable."²

"'I am not like that in myself' (9:35) means 'that is not the way it is with regard to my case.'"³

Job's challenge to God ch. 10

This whole chapter, another prayer (cf. 7:7-21), is a cry to God for answers: "Let me know why ..." (v. 2). God's silence intensifies suffering. Notice the legal setting again, especially in verse 2. Job speculated about the motives that lay behind God's treatment of him by raising three questions (vv. 3, 4, 5-6). Job again claimed to be "not guilty" (v. 7).

"Job here reaches a new milestone in his confrontation with God: while in chap. 3 he laid no claim to guiltlessness, and in chaps. 6—7 he had stressed his unhappiness more than his innocence (though cf. 6:10c, 30), in this speech he not only vigorously protests his innocence (9:15, 20, 21), but here [v. 7]—for the first time—asserts that God also knows that he is innocent."⁴

"It is a remarkable fact, apparently unobserved by commentators, but very revealing of Job's mind, that in none of his petitions does he make the obvious request for his sickness to be cured. As if everything will be all right when he is well again! That would not answer the question which is more urgent than every other concern: 'Why?'"⁵

¹Ibid., p. 148. See Wiersbe, p. 25.

²Andersen, p. 151. Cf. 4:17; 9:2, 3, 14. See also Smick, "Job," p. 912.

³Zuck, *Job*, p. 50.

⁴Clines, p. 247.

⁵Andersen, p. 152.

Job marveled that God would expend such care on him from the womb to the tomb only to destroy him (vv. 8-17; cf. v. 11 with Ps. 139:13). Again Job expressed a desire to die (vv. 18-22; cf. ch. 3; 6:8-9). He evidently had little revelation concerning life after death. For him death opened the door to a land of shadows, gloom, and darkness (vv. 21-22), but he welcomed it as better than life as he was experiencing it. Each of Job's speeches so far concluded with some reference to death and gloom (3:21-22; 7:21; 10:21-22). He was a broken man.

"... for the first time, Job has brought to the surface his sense of the anger of God. And that anger, whether or not it is a reality, must be met by a radical anger within Job."¹

"The God represented by the friends is a God of absolute justice; the God of Job is a God of absolute power. The former deals according to the objective rule of right; the latter according to a freedom which, because removed from all moral restraint, is pure caprice."²

Both of these views of God are limited.

"If we are tempted to criticize [Job], we should ever remember that in the whole Book God lays no charge against His child. Terrible things were these which Job uttered about God, but at least they were honest."³

5. Zophar's first speech ch. 11

Zophar took great offense at what Job had said. He responded viciously with an aggressiveness that outdid both Eliphaz and Bildad. He even accused Job of being a liar (vv. 4-6).

"Whereas for Eliphaz Job's suffering is brought about by some relatively trifling sin and is therefore bound to be soon relieved (4:5-6), and for Bildad also Job's essential righteousness is confirmed by the fact that he, unlike his children, has not been

¹Clines, p. 252.

²Delitzsch, 1:174.

³Morgan, p. 206.

cut off from life (8:4-6), for Zophar Job's suffering is *nothing but deserved suffering*."¹

Zophar was a dogmatist. McGee called him a legalist.²

"He ... attempted heavy handed shock treatment to get through to Job."³

"The Naamathite is the least engaging of Job's three friends. There is not a breath of compassion in his speech. ... His censorious chiding shows how little he has sensed Job's hurt. Job's bewilderment and his outbursts are natural; in them we find his humanity, and our own. Zophar detaches the words from the man, and hears them only as *babble* and mockery (verse 2). This is quite unfair. Zophar's wisdom is a bloodless retreat into theory. It is very proper, theologically familiar and unobjectionable. But it is flat beer compared with Job's seismic sincerity."⁴

"What Job needed was a helping hand, not a slap in the face."⁵

"How sad it is when people who should share ministry end up creating misery."⁶

Zophar's rebuke of Job 11:1-6

Four things about Job bothered Zophar: his loquacity (v. 2), his boasting (v. 3), his self-righteousness (v. 4), and his ignorance (v. 5).

"Zophar exaggerates what Job has said about his innocence (see 9:14-21) to make Job look foolish. Job never stated that his doctrine was pure."⁷

¹Clines, p. 258.

²McGee, 2:607.

³Smick, "Job," p. 917.

⁴Andersen, p. 156. See also Blaiklock, p. 304.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 26

⁶Ibid. Cf. Rom. 12:15.

⁷*The Nelson ...*, p. 838.

Verses 5 and 6 are full of sarcasm. Zophar believed Job deserved much worse punishment than God was giving him (v. 6b).

"Now whereas Eliphaz has set Job's suffering in the context of his whole life (his suffering is just a temporary pinprick), and Bildad has set it in the context of the fate of his family (the children are dead, Job is not), Zophar ... perceives no such context for Job's pain. The fact is, he would say, that Job is suffering, and suffering is inevitably the product of sin. To contextualize Job's suffering and try to set it in proportion is ultimately to trivialize it. Zophar is for principle rather than proportion; the bottom line is that Job is a [secret, vv. 4-6] sinner suffering hard at this moment for his sin."¹

Zophar's praise of God's wisdom 11:7-12

Eliphaz and Bildad had spoken mainly of God's justice. Zophar extolled His wisdom. He rightly explained that God's wisdom is unfathomable, but he inadvertently claimed to fathom it by saying Job deserved more punishment than he was getting (v. 6).

Verse 12 may have been a proverb common in Job's day. It means that it is harder for a fool (empty head) to learn wisdom than for a wild donkey, notorious for its stupidity, to be born again as a man.² In Zophar's view, Job was extremely foolish because he failed to see the truth of what Eliphaz and Bildad had said. He could not see Job as a sufferer but only as a guilty sinner.

Zophar's appeal to Job 11:13-20

Three steps would bring Job back to where he should be, said Zophar: repentance (v. 13), prayer (v. 13), and reformation (v. 14). He also painted the fruits of conversion for Job. These benefits were a clear conscience, faithfulness, and confidence (v. 15); forgetfulness of his troubles (v. 16); joy (v. 17); hope and rest (v. 18); and peace, popularity, leadership, and security (v. 19). Ironically, these benefits were already Job's, according to 1:1. Like Bildad, Zophar ended his first speech with a fire-breathing warning (v. 20; cf. 8:22).

¹Clines, p. xl.

²Delitzsch, 1:184.

"If Zophar was rough of manner, his desire and hope for Job may be observed, for his description of the prosperity which will come if he but set his heart right is longer and more beautiful than that of either Eliphaz or Bildad."¹

Whereas Eliphaz's authority was personal experience, and Bildad's was tradition, Zophar's seems to have been intuition (cf. 20:1-5). It appears that Zophar held to what he believed about divine retribution simply because it seemed right to him. He offered no other reason for adopting this view than that it was self-evident—to him at least. His speech was more emotional than any given so far.

"The child who defined 'sympathy' as 'your pain in my heart' knew more about giving comfort than did these three."²

6. Job's first reply to Zophar chs. 12—14

In these chapters Job again rebutted his friends and their view of God. He also challenged God and brooded over death. Half of this section is dialogue with his friends (12:1—13:19) and half is prayer to God (13:20—14:22). Job could not agree with his friends' conclusion, but neither could he explain why God was dealing with him as He was. He could only conclude that God was not just.

"... for the first time Job directly invites God to enter into disputation with him (13:22) and specifies the question which the disputation is intended to resolve (13:23-24) ..."³

Job's repudiation of his friends 12:1—13:19

For the first time, also, Job spoke contemptuously to his conversation partners. Verse 2 is irony; his companions were not as wise as they thought (cf. 13:2). Job pointed out that much of what they had said about God was common knowledge (cf. 5:9-10; 8:13-19; 11:7-9). Nonetheless their conclusion, that the basis of man's relationship with God is his deeds, did not fit the facts of life. Job cited his own case as proof, as well as the fact that the wicked often prosper (12:6). He said even the animals know that

¹Morgan, p. 206.

²Wiersbe, p. 19.

³Clines, p. 288.

God sends calamities (12:7-9; cf. 11:12). Some students of this book believe that verses 7 through 12 are Job's sarcastic statement of what he perceived his companions would say.¹

"We cannot therefore judge of men's piety by their plenty, nor of what they have in their heart by what they have in their hand."²

"In spite of his censure, Job shows here a remarkably perceptive pastoral concern for the spiritual safety of his friends."³

"The grounds of Job's assault on his friends should be appreciated, for his attitude has been commonly misconstrued by commentators. In particular, they often say that Job doubts the justice of God. But the warning he gives his friends is based on certainty that they cannot deceive God (9), or get away with things done *in secret* (10). God will deal with them in strict justice, and their 'defences [*sic*] will crumble like clay' (12, NEB)."⁴

Verse 9 contains Job's only reference to Yahweh. Perhaps the phrase "the hand of the LORD has done this" was a proverbial expression in Job's day.⁵

Verse 12 may also be irony; this was not what Job believed. On the other hand, Job may have been quoting his friends or asking a rhetorical question: "Is wisdom with aged men ...?" (NIV, TNIV, NRSV, NET2).⁶ Job then proceeded to show that God is the only truly wise Person (12:13)—in refutation of Bildad (8:8). Job mentioned several outrageous acts of God that demonstrate His mysterious wisdom (cf. chs. 38—41).⁷ He also

¹E.g., Robert Gordis, "Quotations as a Literary Usage in Biblical, Oriental and Rabbinic Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 22 (1949):157-219; Clines, p. 292.

²Henry, p. 533.

³Andersen, p. 164.

⁴Ibid., p. 165.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:199; Clines, p. 294.

⁶NIV is *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, 1984; TNIV is *The Holy Bible: Today's International Version*, 2005; and NET2 is *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019.

⁷See A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 65-70, for discussion of God's attribute of wisdom.

pointed out God's great power as seen in the processes of nature and the affairs of nations (12:14-21).

In the ancient Near Eastern myths, the qualities of wisdom and power often resided in different gods, not in the same god.¹ Man can only understand God's ways by special revelation from God. His ways are inscrutable (12:22; cf. 11:7). God also darkens people's understanding (12:24-25). In short, history shows that all the world's leading authorities have not enjoyed God's blessing, as they should have if his friends' major premise was correct (12:13-25). This section (vv. 13-25) is a hymn of praise to God for His power in the world (cf. 9:5-10, a hymn glorifying His power in nature).

If his companions wanted to appeal to their own experience as authoritative, Job would too (13:1-2). Since Job's friends could not solve his problems, he asked God to speak with him and tell him what He had against him (13:3). "Smear with lies" (13:4) means "plaster with lies," cover up the truth.² Job urged his counselors to keep quiet (v. 5). He warned them that God would punish them for trying to defend Him at the expense of the truth (vv. 10-11). He wanted them to say no more, and he turned to speak with God (v. 12a).

"He certainly considers God to be his enemy, but, like David, he thinks it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man (2 Sam. xxiv. 14)."³

In his remarks dealing with his friends' inability to represent God (13:6-12), Job again used legal language. It seemed incredible to Job that God's self-appointed defense attorneys should use faulty arguments, be partial, and be lying fools. God later reproved these men for misrepresenting Him (42:7-8). They were not really defending God but their own views about God. We should be careful not to do this. Even though Job doubted God's concern for justice, he inconsistently believed God would judge his three friends justly. God's justice was a major problem for Job.

As he prepared to present his case to God, Job asked his friends to be silent and to listen (13:13-19; cf. 13:5, 6). Job realized he was risking his life to speak to God as he did (13:14). One translation of verse 15 is, "Behold, He will slay me; I do not have hope. I will present my case to His

¹Hartley, p. 213. Cf. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 33-34.

²Victor Reichert, *Job*, p. 61.

³Delitzsch, 1:241.

face."¹ Job evidently expected God to kill him for what he was about to say, but he wanted answers more than life. Job had prepared his defense as a good lawyer (13:18a), and he believed he would win his case (13:18b; cf. 9:28b), even though God would kill him.

"My friend, the minute you go into the presence of God to start defending yourself, you will lose your case. When you stand before Him, you can only plead guilty, because He knows you."²

Still, Job's hope was in God (v. 15). He again asserted his innocence for which he was willing to die (13:19a).

"While this verse [v. 15] is widely known as a powerful statement of Job's trust in God, it is not without difficulties. The Hebrew word translated *Him* is similar in sound to the Hebrew word for *no*. Thus some have translated the verse as follows: 'Behold, He will slay me; I have no hope.' Yet the positive translation of the verse as it is here seems preferable because it follows the flow of the section (vv. 13-19), which has other positive elements (see vv. 16, 19). It also makes wonderful sense within the verse. Job believes that God is in the process of slowly taking his life. But in a bold declaration of faith, Job declares his absolute trust in God. For when he would be brought into God's presence, he would plead his cause directly with God. And then, if not before, Job would rediscover what he had never really lost: God's love and salvation (v. 16)."³

Job's presentation of his case to God 13:20-28

As in his replies to Eliphaz (7:12-21) and Bildad (9:28-33; 10:2-19), Job also addressed God in this reply to Zophar (13:20—14:22). Job asked God to stop afflicting him and to stop terrifying him (13:20-21). He also requested a courtroom confrontation with God (13:22). God did not reply, so Job asked Him to list his sins (13:23). Still there was no answer. This led Job to ask why God was hiding and hostile to him (13:24-26). Frustrated by God's lack of response, Job sank down again into despair.

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 61. Cf. NRSV.

²McGee, 2:611.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 841. Cf. Clines, p. 313.

"We must admit that a lot of our praying is really giving orders to God. We pray as if we are a top sergeant talking to a buck private in the rear ranks. We say, 'You do that,' or 'You do it this way.' But God doesn't move that way."¹

Job's despair ch. 14

In this melancholic lament Job bewailed the brevity of life (vv. 1-6), the finality of death (vv. 7-17), and the absence of hope (vv. 18-22). The focus changes from Job personally to humanity generally.

"Born of woman" (v. 1) reflects man's frailty, since woman who bears him is frail.

"Human life is poor in days, but rich in turmoil ..."²

Verse 4 means, "Who can without God's provision of grace make an unclean person clean?" (cf. 9:30-31; 25:4). God has indeed determined the life span of every individual (v. 5).³

It seemed unfair to Job that a tree could come back to life after someone had cut it down, but a person could not (vv. 7-10). As I mentioned before, Job gives no evidence of knowing about divine revelation concerning what happens to a human being after death. He did not know that there would be bodily resurrection from Sheol, the place of departed spirits (v. 12).⁴ He longed for death (v. 13). But he did not believe that there was life after death (vv. 10-12).⁵

Essentially, "Sheol" in the Old Testament is the place where the dead go. There was common belief in the continuing personal existence of one's spirit after death. Job did not believe that people experience annihilation after death.⁶ When the place where unrighteous people go is in view, the

¹McGee, 2:612.

²Clines, p. 324.

³See J. Kirby Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas*, ch. 2: "Euthanasia."

⁴See Hartley, pp. 235-37.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:231, 246-47.

⁶Ibid., p. 244.

reference is to hell. When the righteous are in view, Sheol refers to either death or the grave.¹

God later revealed that everyone, righteous and unrighteous, will stand before Him some day (Acts 24:15; Heb. 9:27; et al.), and God will resurrect the bodies of the dead (1 Cor. 15). Job believed he would stand before God, though he had no assurance from God that he would (v. 16). Evidently Job believed as he did because it seemed to him that such an outcome would be right. He evidently believed in the theoretical possibility of resurrection but had no assurance of it.² When he finally had his meeting with God, Job was confident that God would clear him of the false charges against him.

The final section of this chapter (vv. 18-22) contains statements that reflect the despair Job felt as he contemplated the remainder of his life without any changes or intervention by God. All he could look forward to, with any hope or confidence, was death.

The reply by Job in this chapter was really his answer to the major argument and several specific statements all three of his companions had made so far. Job responded to Zophar (12:3), but his words in that reply (chs. 12—14) responded to statements his other friends had made as well.

C. THE SECOND CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND HIS THREE FRIENDS **CHS. 15—21**

Why is there a second cycle of speeches at all, much less a third cycle? Haven't Job's friends expressed themselves fully by this time? They really make no new points in cycles two and three. Job, however, is another story. As his agony wore on, his position and perspective continued to mutate. It is probably to trace this pilgrimage that the writer continued to record cycles two and three.³

In the second cycle of speeches, Job's companions did not change their minds about why Job was suffering and the larger issue of the basis of the

¹See A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels*, ch. 3: "Death and Afterlife."

²See James Orr, "Immortality in the Old Testament," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 259.

³Clines, p. 346.

divine-human relationship. They continued to hold the dogma of retribution: that God without exception blesses good people and punishes bad people *in this life*. Galatians 6:7 says, "Whatever a person sows, this he will also reap." However, it is wrong to conclude that we will inevitably reap what we sow *before we die*. Our final judgment will come after death. Job and his friends lacked this long view of life and focused on life before death. The Book of Ecclesiastes also takes the short view of life.

The spirit of Job's friends did change, however, to one of greater hostility. They seem to have abandoned hope that direct appeals to Job would move him to repent, because they no longer called on him to repent. Instead they stressed the fate of the wicked and only indirectly urged him to repent. In their first speeches, their approach was more intellectual; they challenged Job to think logically. In their second speeches, their approach was more emotional; they sought to convict Job's conscience.

"In the first [cycle of speeches] Eliphaz had emphasised [*sic*] the moral perfection of God, Bildad his unwavering justice, and Zophar his omniscience. Job in reply had dwelt on his own unmerited sufferings and declared his willingness to meet God face to face to argue his case. Having failed to stir his conscience, the friends see in him a menace to all true religion, and in the second cycle their rebukes are sharper than in the first, though their characters are still carefully preserved."¹

"Communication between Job and his friends has now all but disappeared."²

1. Eliphaz's second speech ch. 15

Job's responses so far had evidently convinced Eliphaz that Job was a hardened sinner in defiant rebellion against God.³

"There is a great change in tone between this address of Eliphaz and the first. There is no tenderness here. The

¹Rowley, p. 107. Cf. Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 85.

²Ibid., p. 86.

³Pope, p. 114.

philosophy of life is stated wholly on the negative side, and it was impossible for Job to misunderstand the meaning."¹

"The knot of the controversy becomes constantly more entangled since Job strengthens the friends more and more in their false view by his speeches ..."²

Clines, however, took a softer approach to Eliphaz (and to the other friends) than most commentators, as the following quotation illustrates:

"It is fundamental to Eliphaz's attitude that he is not intent on proving Job a sinner; he never desires to 'condemn' Job or put him in the wrong ... His motive is to encourage Job (cf. 4:6). But Job's speech is disrespectful of God and is inevitably putting Job, who is essentially an innocent man, in the wrong. ... Eliphaz is dismayed to see his righteous friend putting himself in danger by his wild words. If only Job could hear himself talking, he would realize that this is no way for a pious man to behave!"³

Job's attitude rebuked 15:1-16

Eliphaz accused Job of speaking irreverently (vv. 1-6) and of pretending to be wiser and purer than he was (vv. 7-16). For a second time one of his friends said Job was full of hot air (vv. 2-3; cf. 8:2). The east wind (v. 2) was the dreaded sirocco that blew in destruction from the Arabian Desert.

"Eliphaz was using one of the oldest tactics in debate—if you can't refute your opponent's arguments, attack his words and make them sound like a lot of hot air."⁴

Eliphaz judged that Job's iniquity ("wrongdoing," v. 5) caused him to speak as he did.

"This is another debater's trick: when you can't refute the speech, ridicule the speaker."⁵

¹Morgan, p. 208.

²Delitzsch, 1:251.

³Clines, pp. 348-49.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 32.

⁵Ibid.

Eliphaz felt insulted that Job, a younger man, had rejected the wisdom of his older friends. This, he believed, was an act of disrespect on Job's part, and Eliphaz interpreted it as a claim to superior wisdom. Job had made no such claim, however; he only said he had equal intelligence (12:3; 13:2). He did not claim to know why he was suffering as he was, only that his friends' explanation was wrong. Eliphaz interpreted Job's prayers of frustration to God as rebellion against God (vv. 12-13), which they were not. We need to be careful to avoid this error too. Eliphaz was correct in judging all people to be corrupt sinners (v. 14), but he was wrong to conclude that Job was suffering because he was rebelling against God.

The fate of the wicked 15:17-35

Perhaps Eliphaz wanted to scare Job into repenting with his words. As before, Eliphaz's authority was his own observations (v. 17; cf. 4:8). To this he added the wisdom of their ancestors (vv. 18-19; cf. 8:8). Probably verse 18 means: Wise men have not hidden their fathers' traditions. In the ancient world, people considered it foolish to reject the traditions of the past.

Several troubles come on the wicked person because of his sin (vv. 20-35). He writhes in pain—the same Hebrew word describes labor pains—all his life (v. 20a; cf. 14:22). He dies earlier than the godly do (v. 20b; cf. 14:5). He has irrational fears (v. 21a). He suffers destruction while at peace (v. 21b; cf. 1:13-19; 12:6). He experiences torment by a guilty conscience (v. 22a). He feels he is a hunted person (v. 22b). He is anxious about his basic needs (v. 23), and he feels distressed and in anguish (v. 24; cf. 7:14; 9:34; 13:21; 14:20). Job had confessed every one of these troubles. Eliphaz implied that Job had all the marks of a wicked man. He stressed the inner turmoil of the wicked in this list. He also reminded Job that God will destroy the wicked (v. 20).

The writer set forth verses 20-35 in a chiasmic structure to emphasize the reasons for these judgments, which form the heart of the section:

- A Judgments of the wicked 15:20-24
- B Reasons for the judgments 15:25-26
- B' Reasons for the judgments 15:27-28
- A' Judgments of the wicked 15:29-35

The reasons for the judgments were essentially two: rebellion against God (vv. 25-26) and self-indulgence (vv. 27-28). Verse 28 may mean: "He proudly lived in ruined cities and rebuilt houses previously unoccupied, thus defying the curse on ruined sites (15:28; cf. Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34)."¹

Seven more judgments follow in verses 29-35. The wicked person will not prosper (v. 29) but will die (v. 30a). His works will fail (v. 30b-c) and he will suffer prematurely (v. 31-32a; cf. 4:8). His wealth will fail (v. 32b-33), he will experience barrenness (v. 34; cf. 3:7; 4:21; 8:22), and he deceives himself (v. 31). Note that Eliphaz began this section with a reference to childbirth (v. 20) and ended it with another reference to the same thing (v. 35).

"... though the wicked is fated to die without natural progeny [v. 34] he nevertheless begets an unnatural disreputable brood."²

Not all of these judgments are completely distinct from one another. Poetic parallelism often uses a slight restatement to make a more forceful impression, rather than to express a different idea.

"It is a subtlety of our author that Eliphaz, who began by calling Job a wind-bag (verse 2), ends his own speech with a pile of verbiage. With tedious repetition, assertion not argument, he presents the doctrine 'you reap what you sow' in several forms."³

"In man Eliphaz sees only the life of nature and not the life of grace, which, because it is the word of God, makes man irreproachable before God. He sees in Job only the rough shell, and not the kernel; only the hard shell, and not the pearl."⁴

2. Job's second reply to Eliphaz chs. 16—17

This response reflects Job's increasing disinterest in the words of his accusers. He warned them and then proceeded to bewail his isolation.

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 74.

²Clines, p. 364.

³Andersen, p. 179.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:277.

Job's disgust with his friends 16:1-5

Job said his visitors had said nothing new to help him (v. 1). He picked up Eliphaz's word (translated "harm" in 15:35) and used it to describe him and his companions as "miserable," pain-inflicting comforters (an oxymoron, v. 2). Eliphaz's words had not brought the consolation he had promised (15:11). He and his friends had proved to be more interested in blaming than in comforting. Job charged his visitors with being the real windbags (v. 3; cf. 8:2; 15:2). He claimed that he himself would provide more comfort than they were delivering, which Eliphaz had previously admitted Job could do (4:4). What the friends should have done was try to "restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1).

"The longer the saw of contention is drawn the hotter it grows.
... The patient's case is sad indeed when his medicines are
poisons and his physicians his worst disease."¹

Job's distress at God's hand 16:6-17

Job's friends did not cause his greatest discomfort, however; from Job's perspective God did. Most of the verses in this pericope are easy to understand.

"Job's assumption that God was angry with him [in v. 9] implies that Job subconsciously felt that God was punishing him for some unknown sin of which Job was unaware. He wished that God would reveal this to him (10:2)."²

"In general, it is the wrath of God whence Job thinks his suffering proceeds."³

Evidently Job had suffered abuse at the hands of young people who harassed him at the city dump where he was staying (v. 11). A defeated animal often thrusts its horn or horns in the dust. Job compared himself to such an animal (v. 15).

"To exalt the horn—an expression often occurring in the poetic and prophetic parts of the Bible—means to advance in power,

¹Henry, p. 539.

²Parsons, p. 154. Cf. 34:9; 35:3.

³Delitzsch, 1:283.

honor, and dominion. To defile it in the dust is a figure drawn from the condition of a dying ox or stag, who literally defiles his horn in dust, mingled with his own blood. It is painfully significant of defeat, disgrace, and death, and for a prince like Job it was to be dishonored and utterly overthrown."¹

Again Job admitted no action or attitude worthy of his intense suffering (v. 17).

Job's desire for a representative in heaven 16:18—17:2

Job called on the earth not to cover his blood (v. 18)—so it might cry to God for vindication (cf. Gen. 4:10). Job did not want people to forget his case when he died. He wanted someone to answer his questions and to vindicate his innocence even if he was not alive to witness it. The witness/advocate to which he referred (v. 19) seems to be some heavenly witness other than God (v. 21).² Some commentators, however, believed Job had God in mind.³ Certainly the God-man, Jesus Christ, our "Advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1), is the person whom God provided to meet this need.

However, Job did not have revelation concerning Him, as far as the text indicates. Job longed for *someone* to plead with God for him, since God was apparently ignoring his cries. Moreover, Job's companions were not pleading his case, as true friends should have done (16:20; 17:2).

"With increasing clarity Job is seeing that satisfactory answers might be gained only when he has more direct dealings with God after death."⁴

"In all the movement of this great answer it would seem as though outlines of the truth were breaking upon Job."⁵

Job's disclaimer of his friends 17:3-5

Evidently in legal cases of this sort, each litigant would give the judge a bond (money or some personal possession) before the trial. This bond

¹Thomson, 1:102.

²See Parsons, pp. 148-49.

³E.g., Hartley, p. 264.

⁴Andersen, p. 183.

⁵Morgan, p. 208.

would guarantee that the litigant would be fair and honest during the trial. If one of the litigants was not, the judge would not return his bond to him at the trial's end.¹ Job called on God to lay down His pledge (as the prosecutor) with Himself (the judge; 17:3a; cf. Ps. 119:121-22). He viewed God in both of these roles. The guarantor (17:3b) was one who provided the bond if the person on trial could not. Job's supportive friends would normally have provided his bond, but they had turned against him.

Consequently, Job believed that only God Himself could guarantee his innocence. Job lay the ultimate responsibility for his friends' blindness and rejection at God's feet, because God had withheld understanding from them. Consequently he believed God would not lift them up (17:4). Job may have believed part of his friends' motive in not helping him was that they could obtain a portion of his property when he died (17:5). However, since verse 5 is a proverb, he may have only been reminding his friends of the serious consequences of slander.²

Job's despair in the face of death 17:6-16

Job proceeded to accuse God of making him a byword (proverb) to others (v. 6). Perhaps parents were pointing to him as an example of what happens to a person who lives a hypocritical life. One writer suggested that verse 6 should read, "Therefore I repudiate and repent of dust and ashes."³ This statement would express Job's intention to abandon mourning. However, most interpreters have not adopted this rendering. Job did not stop mourning.

Bright flashing eyes were and still are a sign of vitality, but Job's eyes had grown dim because of his suffering (v. 7). Nonetheless, Job still believed that his experiences would not discourage other godly people from opposing the wicked (v. 8b).

"... far from allowing suffering to draw him from God to the side of the godless, he [Job] gathers strength thereby only still more perseveringly to pursue righteousness of life and purity of conduct, since suffering, especially in connection with such experiences as Job now has with the three friends, drives

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 79.

²Smick, "Job," p. 933.

³Dale Patrick, "The Translation of Job XVII 6," *Vetus Testamentum* 26:3 (July 1976):369-71.

him to God and makes his communion with Him closer and firmer. These words of Job ... are like a rocket which shoots above the tragic darkness of the book, lighting it up suddenly, although only for a short time."¹

In verse 10, Job invited his friends to attack him again with another round of arguments.

"It is important to remind oneself that Job is not simply despairing that his life seems to be drawing to a close. The sting of death for him is that it will prevent him from witnessing his own vindication, and will make him powerless to have any hand in bringing it to pass."²

Job ended his speech, again, with a gloomy reference to the grave and his anticipated death (vv. 13-16). Whereas his friends promised light if he would repent, Job realized that he had nothing to repent of, so his only hope was the darkness of death.

"However, at no time did Job ever consider taking his own life or asking someone else to do it for him. Life is a sacred gift from God, and only God can give it and take it away."³

"Their [the friends'] speeches exhibit skill as to their form, but the sympathy of the heart is wanting. Instead of plunging with Job into the profound mystery of God's providence, which appoints such a hard lot for the righteous man to endure, they shake their heads, and think: What a great sinner Job must be, that God should visit him with so severe a punishment! It is the same shaking of the head of which David complains Ps. xxii. 8 and cix. 25, and which the incomparably righteous One experienced from those who passed by His cross, Matt. xxvii. 39, Mark xv. 29."⁴

"All that Job says here of the scorn that he has to endure by being regarded as one who is punished of God and tormented, agrees exactly with the description of the sufferings of the

¹Delitzsch, 1:300.

²Clines, p. 400.

³Wiersbe, p. 35.

⁴Delitzsch, 1:308.

servant of Jehovah in the Psalms and the second part of Isaiah."¹

3. Bildad's second speech ch. 18

In his second speech, Bildad emphasized the fate of the wicked. There is little that is unique in Bildad's second speech, but it was harsher than his first speech.

"Bildad's second speech is straightforward. It is no more than a long diatribe on the fate of the wicked (5-21), preceded by a few reproaches addressed to Job (2-4)."²

Bildad's criticism of Job 18:1-4

Obviously Bildad was impatient because Job refused to change his mind or admit great guilt (vv. 1-2). Job had claimed that God was tearing him like a beast tears its prey (16:9), but Bildad said Job was tearing himself (v. 4a). We can see his disgust with what he regarded as Job's pride in his statement that Job should not expect God to do anything particularly great on Job's account (v. 4b-c).

"A speaker who has run out of ideas can always resort to satire. No [true] pastor mocks a sufferer by throwing his own words back at him."³

Bildad's warning concerning the wicked 18:5-21

Here are some of the things both Eliphaz and Bildad pointed out concerning the wicked:

Eliphaz	The wicked ...	Bildad
15:22-23, 30	experience darkness.	18:5-6, 18
15:30b, 32-33	are like unhealthy plants.	18:16
15:30, 34	are destroyed by fire.	18:15

¹Ibid., 1:309.

²Andersen, p. 187.

³Ibid., p. 188.

15:27-31	lose their influence.	18:7, 15-16
15:21, 24	are terrified by anguish.	18:11, 14
15:34	lose their homes.	18:6, 14-15
15:4, 13, 25-26	oppose or do not know God.	18:21
15:13	are ensnared.	18:8-10

Bildad painted four vivid pictures of the death of the wicked in this passage: a light put out (vv. 5-6), a traveler trapped (vv. 7-10), a criminal pursued (vv. 11-15), and a tree rooted up (vv. 16-21).¹

Another noteworthy feature of this section is the frequent recurrence of the idea that the wicked will end up in a trap, especially in verses 8-10. Bildad promised not only the capture of the wicked but that they would experience terror, like animals hunted down by a predator (v. 11). As in Eliphaz's second speech, much of what Bildad said here concerning the wicked he claimed was true of Job (e.g., 18:13a, 15). "The first-born of death" probably views diseases as the children of death.² It may refer to "death in its most terrible form."³ Another possibility is that this is a reference to Namtar, the Mesopotamian god of pestilence and vizier of the underworld.⁴ Both Job and Bildad had a lot to say about death: "the king of terrors" (v. 14).

"Bildad felt Job did not really understand the doctrine of retribution. He probably considered Job weak on this subject because Job kept harping on how the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. In these speeches Job and his friends had nothing to say about future retribution at the day of final judgment or the balancing of the scales of justice after death. This is a truth that unveils gradually (progressive revelation) in the OT."⁵

¹Wiersbe, pp 37-38.

²Delitzsch, 1:323.

³Rowley, p. 130.

⁴John B. Burns, "The Identity of Death's First-Born (Job XVIII 13)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37:3 (July 1987):362-64.

⁵Smick, "Job," pp. 936-37.

"This second speech of Bildad begins, like the first (ch. viii. 2), with the reproach of endless babbling; but it does not end like the first (ch. viii. 22). The first closed with the words: 'Thy haters shall be clothed with shame, and the tent of the godless is no more;' the second is only an amplification of the second half of this conclusion, without taking up again anywhere the tone of promise, which there also embraces the threatening."¹

"There is nothing new in Bildad's speech, of course, but how finely it is said!"²

Often, when we counsel suffering people, it is more important to help them think about God and talk to Him than it is to get them to adopt all of our theology. Job's companions seem to have given up on Job because he would not agree with their theological presupposition. They failed to give him credit for being sincere in his desire to come to terms with God.

4. Job's second reply to Bildad ch. 19

This speech is one of the more important ones in the book, because in it, Job reached a new low and a new high in his personal experience. He revealed here the extent of his rejection by his friends, relatives, and servants, but he also came to a new confidence in God. Bildad had spoken of the terrors of death, and now Job described the trials of life—his own life. He did so by using seven figures to describe himself: an animal trapped (v. 6), a criminal in court (v. 7), a traveler fenced in (v. 8), a king dethroned (v. 9), a structure destroyed (v. 10), a tree uprooted (v. 10), and a city besieged (vv. 11-12).³ This is Job's first speech since chapter 3 in which he did not address God, though all that he said was for God's ears; his concern was more to refute his companions.

The hostility of Job's accusers 19:1-6

Job began this reply to Bildad as Bildad had begun both of his speeches: "How long ...?" (v. 2; cf. 8:2; 18:2). How long would his friends torment him? The ten times (v. 3) may have been ten actual occurrences, not all of

¹Delitzsch, 1:331.

²Clines, p. 424.

³Wiersbe, pp. 39-40.

which the writer recorded, or Job may have used ten as a round number meaning often.

"I personally think that Job should have taken the position of silence and that he should not have come out with this defense of himself. He has become alienated from them. If he had kept silent, he would not have had ten reproaches from them. Apparently he doesn't see that."¹

Job claimed that God had not been just in his case (vv. 5-6; cf. 8:3). Rather than snaring himself in his own net, as Bildad insinuated (18:8-10), Job claimed that God had trapped him in His net. God had driven him into a hunter's net.²

The "hostility" of God 19:7-12

Job agreed with his friends that God was responsible for his troubles, but while they believed God was punishing him for his sins, he contended that God was acting unjustly. He saw evidence of God's "injustice," too, in God's silence when he cried out for help (v. 7). Job then named ten (cf. v. 3) hostile actions of God against himself (vv. 8-12). Note the recurrence of "He" in these verses that emphasizes God's responsibility. Bildad had previously cited what overtakes the wicked. Job now showed that God was the source of their troubles (cf. 19:8b with 18:5-6, 18; 19:9 with 18:16-17; 19:10a with 18:7, 12; 19:10b with 18:16; and 19:12 with 18:14).

"One is here reminded of Lam. iii. 7-9; and, in fact, this speech generally stands in no accidental mutual relation to the lamentations of Jeremiah."³

Some readers of Job's words in this pericope have accused Job of blasphemy. However, blasphemy is "any remark deliberately mocking or contemptuous of God."⁴ Job was neither mocking God nor was he being contemptuous of God. He was simply describing God as he perceived Him to be. He could not understand why God was apparently treating him unjustly, and he repeatedly asked God to solve this mystery for him.

¹McGee, 2:621.

²Rowley, p. 134.

³Delitzsch, 1:338.

⁴*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language.*

The hostility of Job's other acquaintances 19:13-22

Metaphorical descriptions of God's hostility to Job (in vv. 8-12) now give way to literal ways in which He opposed him. In describing the people Job referred to in this section, he started with those farthest from him and moved to those closest to him, and from Job's equals to his inferiors socially. He then moved outward, from his wife and brothers, to the neighborhood children, to the larger sphere of his intimates.

Some English translations have Job saying that his own children found him repulsive (v. 17; e.g., ESV, NKJV, HCSB).¹ This seems contradictory, since we read earlier that all of Job's children had perished (1:2, 18-19). Perhaps Job meant, "I *would be* repulsive even to my children."² Other English translations substitute "brothers" (e.g., NASB, NIV, NET2) or "family" (TNIV, NRSV, NEB, CEV) for "children."

Job may have meant by "the skin of my teeth" (v. 20b)—"narrowly"—or that his teeth had fallen out and only his gums remained.

Having found no comfort in other people, Job next turned back to God.

Job's confidence in God 19:23-29

"But it is just here, when everything is blackest, that his faith ... like the rainbow in the cloud ... shines with a marvelous splendor."³

This short section contains probably the best-known verses in the book (vv. 23-27). They are an affirmation of Job's great faith in God. Some writers argued that Job was not expressing hope but despair, because he believed God could vindicate him but would not do so before he died.⁴

¹ESV stands for *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, 2001; and NKJV stands for *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 847.

³W. B. MacLeod, *The Afflictions of the Righteous*, p. 172.

⁴Theophile J. Meek, "Job xix 25-27," *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956):100-103. See also James K. Zink, "Impatient Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84:2 (June 1965):147-52.

"One might even call Job the first Protestant, in the fullest sense of the word. He takes his stand upon individual faith rather than yielding to pious dogma."¹

God granted Job's request in verses 23-24—better than he could have expected. Probably what he had in mind in verse 24 was that someone would chisel letters out of a massive rock and pour in lead making the letters even more prominent and permanent.

Job proceeded to reach out to God in faith (v. 25). Who is the redeemer to whom Job referred? Clines believed that the "Redeemer" is not a personal being, neither human nor divine, but the personification of Job's plea: his protestations of innocence, which would eventually prevail.² Perhaps he is the same person Job requested elsewhere, when he called for a legal arbiter between himself and God (9:33), who would be a witness and an advocate for him (16:19).³ In this interpretation Job seems to have thought of a person other than God.⁴ However, the "redeemer" may have been God Himself, in view of Job's confident statement that he believed he would see God (v. 26).⁵ I prefer this view.

"The Old Testament records several notable instances where people such as Abraham, Moses and Isaiah 'saw' God, and Job doubtless has something similar in mind."⁶

The advocate of 16:19 was in heaven. This opens the possibility for a divine witness, as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless Job called him a man, and this points to a person other than God. The word "redeemer" in Hebrew (*goel*) means one who provided legal protection for a close relative who could not defend himself or herself (cf. Lev. 25:23-25, 47-55; Num. 35:19-27; Ruth 4:4-15; 2 Sam. 14:11; 1 Kings 16:11; Ps. 119:154; Prov. 23:11; Jer. 50:34).

"In pagan theology a personal patron-deity acted as a champion for an individual human, pleading his cause in the council of the gods. In the Book of Job the angels perform this

¹Philip Yancey, "When the Facts Don't Add Up," *Christianity Today*, June 13, 1986, p. 21.

²Clines, pp. 457-58, 460, 462, 470.

³Cf. Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 87.

⁴Parsons, pp. 148-49, 156-57.

⁵Hartley, p. 294; Delitzsch, 1:354.

⁶Andersen, p. 193.

role. In 33:23 Elihu clearly presented his theology of angels that took the place of the pagan servant-deities. He employed the very root (*m/s*) used in 16:20 to describe Job's 'Intercessor.' In each of these Advocate passages, the third party is greater than man; and in chapter 16 he lives in heaven. Yet he is fully capable of taking his stand to testify on earth (19:25)."¹

Job was confident that his redeemer, whomever he may have had in mind, would take up his cause and vindicate him, either before² or after Job died.³ Job added that this person would take His stand on earth "at the last" (v. 25; i.e., finally, not at the end of time). In other words, this person would have the last word.

The Hebrew word translated "earth" (v. 25) literally means "dust." Does this word refer to the grave (cf. 7:21; 17:16; 20:11; 21:26; 34:15) or the earth (cf. 5:6; 8:19; 14:8; 41:33)? Earth seems to be the better possibility because it involves a simpler explanation. If this is the case, Job believed his redeemer would vindicate him eventually in the presence of people who were living on the earth.

Job probably described his skin as destroyed (v. 26) to picture his painful death, not that he expected God to kill him. He believed he would see God after his death. He evidently saw no hope of vindication before he died.

"Though there is no full grasping of a belief in a worthwhile Afterlife with God, this passage is a notable landmark in the progress toward such a belief."⁴

The "another" person of verse 27 is another than God, not another than Job. Job would see God Himself (cf. 16:19). Evidently Job expected to see God after death, but there is no indication in the text that Job knew God would resurrect his body after he died.⁵ He believed in life after death, but he evidently did not know about the certain resurrection of the body. This

¹Smick, "Job," p. 942.

²Hartley, p. 296.

³Rowley, p. 138; Clines, p. 461.

⁴Rowley, p. 140.

⁵Clines, pp. 463-64. Contrast Hanna, p. 266, who believed that Job understood the idea of the resurrection of the body.

revelation came from God after Job's lifetime (cf. Isaiah 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15).

"While he was anticipating the doctrine of resurrection, he was not spelling out the teaching of a final resurrection for all the righteous."¹

"It [vv. 25-27] is related to eschatology as the protevangelium [Gen. 3:15] is to soteriology; it presents only the first lines of the picture, which is worked up in detail later on, but also an outline, sketched in such a way that every later perception may be added to it."²

Clines pointed out the importance of distinguishing between what Job said he *believed* and what he *wished*. He *believed* that he would die before he was vindicated, but that he would be vindicated after he died. He *wished* that he could have a face-to-face encounter with God before he died.³

Though Job may not have known who his Redeemer was, we now know that He was Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). In saying what he did, Job was uttering Messianic prophecy, though he probably did not realize he was doing so.

Having made this breakthrough of faith in God, Job seems less frantic hereafter in the book. He now saw his sufferings in the light of eternity—the long view of life—not just in his lifetime. When we can help people gain this perspective on their sufferings, we will find that they, too, find some relief.

5. Zophar's second speech ch. 20

This speech must have hurt Job more than any that his friends had presented so far. Zophar was brutal in his attack. He continued the theme of the fate of the wicked that Eliphaz and Bildad had emphasized. However, whereas Eliphaz stressed the distress of the wicked and Bildad their trapped position, Zophar elaborated on the fact that wicked people lose their wealth.

¹Smick, "Job," p. 943.

²Delitzsch, 1:372.

³Clines, p. 465.

"Whereas for Eliphaz (chap. 15) the fate of the wicked is a picture of what Job is not, for Bildad (ch. 18) it is a picture of what Job may become, and for Zophar it is a picture of what Job will not avoid without a radical change."¹

"Zophar is deeply disturbed by Job's accusations that the friends are increasing his torment and that God is the source of his present affliction. But unfortunately he does not know how to comfort Job. Neither does he know how to address the issues Job has raised. After a brief rebuke of Job he delivers a long discourse on a single topic—the certain evil fate of every evildoer. He is indirectly rejecting Job's assertion that God will appear as his Redeemer to vindicate him. He counters Job's statement of confidence by saying that the heavens and the earth will stand as witnesses against the evildoer, even against Job. In his view Job's hope is false, and it is deluding him."²

Zophar had nothing new to say, but he said it passionately.

Zophar's anger 20:1-3

"Therefore" (v. 2) must refer to what Job had said. Job had previously asked why his friends answered him (16:3). Zophar replied that the spirit of his understanding made him answer (v. 3b).

"This phrase means both that Zophar's spirit is compelling him to respond to Job (c. 32:18) and that his words come from reasoned insight ..."³

Again he seems to be claiming innate, instinctive knowledge (cf. ch. 11).

The brief prosperity and thorough destruction of the wicked 20:4-11

Zophar reminded Job that everyone knew the wicked only prosper for a short time (cf. 15:29). Verse 5 is his thesis statement. The description of the wicked that Zophar proceeded to draw fit Job very well, and it must

¹Ibid., p. 482.

²Hartley, p. 299.

³Ibid., p. 300.

have wounded him deeply. The life of the wicked is brief (vv. 4-11), their pleasure is temporary (vv. 12-19), and their death is painful (vv. 20-29).¹

"Friends, if there is not an eternity ahead of us, man is the most colossal failure that God has ever made. His life is brief. He flies away as a dream."²

Though verse 10 is notoriously difficult, the meaning is perhaps that the loss of the wicked father's strength in death results in his children being in need. They are made poor because he dies prematurely.³

The unprofitability of wickedness 20:12-23

The wicked gain no lasting profit from their wrongdoing. Verse 16 pictures the wicked eating his delicacies but finding that they have turned to poison in his stomach and are killing him (v. 14).

"Sin tastes good in the mouth but creates terrible cramps and nausea in the stomach (20:12-14)."⁴

"... the punishment of sin is fundamentally nothing but the nature of sin itself brought fully out."⁵

Ancient Near Easterners considered honey (often date syrup) and curds (the part of milk from which cheese is made) delicacies (cf. Judg. 5:25). Zophar explained that while the wicked greedily fill their own bellies, God sends His anger into their bowels (v. 23). In other words, the poor health that accompanies overindulgence is God's instrument of judgment on the wealthy wicked.

The inescapable end of the wicked 20:24-29

If God does not punish the wicked this way—by letting his sin consume him—he will still not escape, because God will catch him some other way (vv. 24-25; cf. 16:13). After he died, God would burn up his possessions

¹Wiersbe, pp. 42-44.

²McGee, 2:623.

³Clines, p. 487.

⁴Merrill, p. 387.

⁵Delitzsch, 1:382.

and family in judgment, as He already had done in Job's case (v. 26; cf. ch. 1).

"... the consumer is consumed. It is a nice irony that the man who lived for eating dies from being eaten."¹

Rather than anticipating divine vindication on the earth, Job should expect God to reveal Job's iniquity and the earth to rise up against him (v. 27; cf. 16:18-19).

Was Zophar correct in his assessment of the wicked person's fate? He was correct in saying that God judges sin, but he was wrong in claiming that God's judgment always takes place during our earthly lifetime. He was also inaccurate in saying that Job was the type of person he described (cf. 1:1).

"Zophar has painted anew the end of the evil-doer in the most hideous colours, in order that Job might behold himself in this mirror, and be astonished at himself."²

"Never was any doctrine better explained, or worse applied, than this by Zophar, who intended by all this to prove Job a hypocrite."³

6. Job's second reply to Zophar ch. 21

After the first cycle of speeches, Job responded to a point each of his friends had made, namely, that God consistently blesses the righteous and blasts the unrighteous. After this second cycle of speeches, Job again replied to a point each accuser had made, namely, that the wicked suffer destruction in this life.

"This speech is unusual for Job on several counts. It is the only one in which he confines his remarks to his friends and does not fall into either a soliloquy or a prayer. The time has come to demolish their position. Secondly, in making this counter-attack, Job reviews a lot of the preceding discussion, so that many cross-references can be found to what has already been said. These are a valuable guide to interpretation when they

¹Clines, p. 496.

²Delitzsch, 1:422.

³Henry, p. 545.

can be discovered. Thirdly, by quoting their words and refuting them, Job comes nearer to formal debate. While his words are still quite emotional, there is less invective in them."¹

"In short, Job's argument is this: if the wicked are not recompensed, neither are the righteous. *That* is the simple meaning of his suffering: there is no meaning to it at all."²

Job's request to be heard 21:1-6

The best consolation his friends could have provided was to listen quietly to Job's reply. So Job requested this (v. 2). He reminded his companions that his complaint was with God, not people. He was impatient because God would not reply.

The wicked person's continued prosperity 21:7-16

Job's friends had been selective in their observations regarding wicked people. They had pointed out only the cases in which God judged them on earth. Job now presented the other side of the story. There were many wicked who never experienced God's judgment before they died (cf. Ps. 37:35). His words contrast especially with what Zophar had just said (ch. 20).

"After the depiction of the prosperity of the wicked in vv 6-13, a second theme in Job's speech emerges here [vv. 14-16]: the godlessness of the wicked that goes unpunished."³

Many people who do not know God, or reject Him, live peaceful, pleasant lives (vv. 14-15; cf. 18:21). Verse 16 may mean that these people's prosperity comes ultimately from God, not from themselves. Still, Job did not want his friends to understand him as supporting the wicked person's contempt for God (v. 16b).

The reason the wicked die 21:17-26

Job claimed that the wicked die for the same reason the righteous die: They are sinners. They do not invariably die early because they are wicked sinners. Furthermore, God does not punish the children of the wicked who

¹Andersen, p. 198.

²David J. A. Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 522.

³*Ibid.*, p. 527.

die late in life for their parents' sins. Job said that would be no punishment on the parents, since they would not be alive to witness their children's suffering. He also pointed out that his companions were putting God in a box by not allowing Him to judge freely but requiring that He behave according to their theological conceptions (v. 22).

"Those who do not believe in an absolutely sovereign God cannot possibly appreciate the depth of the problem Job presented in vv. 23-26. The answer still alludes [*sic* eludes] us. Even with all our additional revelation (Rom. 8:28), we often stand in anguish over the apparent injustice and seeming cruelty of God's providence."¹

"Of course, Job is talking [in verse 26] about the *physical* side of death and not the *spiritual*. When death comes, it obviously makes a great deal of difference *in the next life* whether or not the person had faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27)."²

The lifelong prosperity of some wicked people 21:27-34

By urging his friends to ask travelers (v. 29), Job was accusing them of holding a provincial viewpoint: one formed out of limited exposure to life.

"If Job's friends inquired of well-traveled people, they would learn that in every part of the world, wicked people seem to escape the calamities that fall on the righteous."³

The "day of fury" (v. 30) is probably a reference to the final time God will judge the wicked. Though some writers have taken verse 31 as a quotation of the view of Job's friends, it is probably Job's own view. Men "keep watch over ... [the] tomb" of the wicked (v. 32) probably as protection against grave robbers.⁴

This speech explains Job's position, which certainly squares with reality better than the one his adversaries advocated. Frequently the wicked do prosper throughout their lives. God does not always cut off evil people prematurely. For example, even though Manasseh was Judah's worst king,

¹Smick, "Job," p. 950.

²Wiersbe, p. 46.

³Ibid.

⁴Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 534.

he reigned the longest. Even through Mussolini and Hitler died violent deaths, Lenin and Stalin died in their own beds as old men. Furthermore, "... all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Job accused his friends of being wrong.

"We see ... from the answer of Job to Zophar's speech, that the passionate excitement which Job displayed at first in opposition to the friends has given place to a calmer tone; he has already got over the first impression of disappointed expectation, and the more confidently certain of the infallibility of divine justice he becomes, the more does he feel raised above his accusers. He now expects no further comfort; careful attention to what he has to say shall henceforth be his consolation."¹

At the end of this second cycle, the advantage in the debate was obviously with Job. Any objective observer of what was going on at that time would have had to admit that Job's arguments made more sense than those of his three friends.

"If you want to be an encouragement to hurting people, try to see things through their eyes. Be humble enough to admit that there might be other points of view."²

D. THE THIRD CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND HIS THREE FRIENDS **CHS. 22—27**

The three cycles of speeches in Job are like three rounds in a boxing match, though the competition in this case was intellectual rather than physical. In round one of the debate, Job's friends probed his intellect, and in round two they probed his conscience. In round three, they probed specific issues.

"The lamentable fact is that the friends endorsed Satan's view of Job as a hypocrite. Thinking to defend God, they became Satan's advocates, insisting that he whom God designated as His servant belonged to the devil."³

¹Delitzsch, 1:422-23.

²Wiersbe, p. 47.

³Kline, p. 477.

We could summarize the accusations of Job's three companions in their speeches as follows. First cycle: "You are a sinner and need to repent." Second cycle: "You are wicked and God is punishing you." Third cycle: "You have committed these specific sins."

1. Eliphaz's third speech ch. 22

In his third speech Eliphaz was even more discourteous than he had been previously.

"He [Eliphaz] made three serious accusations against Job: he is a sinner (Job 22:1-11), he is hiding his sins (vv. 12-20), and he must confess his sins and repent before God can help him (vv. 21-30)."¹

"Eliphaz proceeds to reveal the psychological motivation that he believes has led Job to become a sinner."²

God's disinterest in Job 22:1-5

Verse 2 should end "Him" (i.e., God) rather than "himself" (i.e., the wise man), as several English translations do (TNIV, NIV, HCSB, NRSV, NET2).

These verses reveal Eliphaz's very deficient concept of God. To him, God did not delight in fellowship with man or in blessing man. His only reason for intervening in life was to punish people when they misbehaved. Many people today share this unfortunate view of God. Truly God does not need people, but He delights in our righteousness and fellowship, and He loves us.

"Eliphaz is essentially a deist. As Weiser says, 'On the one hand God is here depersonalized, reduced to a mechanistic conception of righteousness as an impartial norm; and on the other hand, as in all law-oriented religion, what remains of human piety is only a utilitarian ethics [*sic* ethic] of obedience that is ultimately motivated by egocentric considerations despite its religious framework.'"³

¹Wiersbe, p. 47.

²Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 93.

³Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 553.

Job's social sins 22:6-11

Taking pledges (v. 6a) consists of stripping people naked (v. 6b), because the pledge that a creditor would take as collateral for a debt would be clothing, in the case of a poor debtor. Verse 8 probably reflects what Eliphaz thought Job's attitude was. Eliphaz implied that Job arrogantly believed the strong, respected man of the world, not the godly man, is the one who controls others and dominates those around him.¹ Were Eliphaz's accusations valid? Were these sins Job had really committed? Job denied them in 31:16-22.

Job's spiritual defiance 22:12-20

Eliphaz proceeded next to judge Job's motives. He assumed Job had concluded that because God was far away in heaven, he would get away with sin on earth. However, Job had affirmed God's omniscience (21:22). So he knew that he could hide nothing from God.

"Presuming to read Job's secret thoughts, Eliphaz puts in Job's mouth blasphemies untrue to the sentiments he has actually expressed (vv. 12-14)."²

Perhaps Eliphaz had in mind the wicked of Noah's generation in verses 15-16. In verse 18a, Eliphaz seems to be admitting that some of the wicked do prosper temporarily. In his view, Job had been one of these fortunate individuals.

Job's need to repent 22:21-30

This appeal sounds almost tender. However, Eliphaz had been very condemning in what he had just accused Job of doing and thinking. Job did not need to repent, as Eliphaz suggested (v. 23). He was not suffering greatly because he had sinned greatly.

"Eliphaz, although unconsciously, in these last words expresses prophetically what will be fulfilled in the issue of the history of Job himself."³

¹Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 180.

²Kline, p. 478.

³Delitzsch, 1:449.

We should not use this type of approach when appealing to the unsaved today, because God does not require reformation before He will accept a sinner. Furthermore, He does not promise physical prosperity to those who repent. Again, Eliphaz's basic retribution theology led him to misrepresent God and misunderstand life.

2. Job's third reply to Eliphaz chs. 23—24

Job temporarily ignored Eliphaz's groundless charges of sin and proceeded to reflect on the problem of God's injustice.

"In the first part of the speech (ch. xxiii.) he [Job] occupies himself with the mystery of his own suffering lot, and in the second part (ch. xxiv.) with the reverse of this mystery, the evil-doers' prosperity and immunity from punishment."¹

"The first part of this speech is superb. The option placed before Job by Eliphaz has clarified his thinking. He has come to quite different conclusions, and he expresses them in a soliloquy, for he does not appear to be addressing either Eliphaz or God."²

Job's longing 23:1-7

Job admitted that he had rebelled against God to the extent that he had complained about his condition (v. 2a). "His hand" (v. 2b) is "My hand" in the Hebrew text, and that is the better reading. The former translation was influenced by the Septuagint and Syriac versions. Job had not given up his desire to present his case before God before he died (cf. 9:14-16), though he had little hope of doing so (v. 3).

"I can assure you that any man who has that longing for God in his heart is going to find Him. God will meet him."³

"It is obvious that Job rests his hope for a favorable decision on the Judge's just character."⁴

¹Ibid., 2:41.

²Andersen, p. 207.

³McGee, 2:629.

⁴Hartley, p. 339.

"It would be wonderful if his friends knew how to bring him into the presence of the throne of grace. He doesn't need a throne of judgment; he has already been there."¹

Job's innocence 23:8-12

Wherever Job looked, he could not find God. Two paraphrases of verse 10 are these: Because (the first word in the verse in Hebrew) He knows my ways, God is evading me. "He knows I am innocent and therefore is refusing to appear in court, for once He heard my case He would have to admit to injustice."² A third and better explanation, I think, follows:

"A more literal translation ... yields: 'But he (God) knows (his) way with me.' Because God knows what He is doing with Job, Job is coming to a point where he will be satisfied even if God never explains the reason for His strange conduct. Earlier Job had demanded to know why God was dealing with him thus, and he found his trial insufferable (7:18). Now he accepts the testing, because he knows: *I shall come forth as gold.*"³

Job believed that people would eventually recognize that he was as pure as gold (cf. 22:25). Job had this hope because he trusted God and had walked before God faithfully (vv. 11-12; cf. 22:15).

"Here Job's assurance that God is concerned with his well-being rises to its highest point."⁴

"When God puts His own people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much."⁵

Job's frustration 23:13—24:17

God's irresistible power and inscrutable behavior made Job afraid (23:13-17). Nevertheless he determined to confront God with His apparent

¹McGee, 2:629.

²Zuck, *Job*, p. 108.

³Andersen, p. 210.

⁴Hartley, p. 340.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 51.

injustice. What God had planned for Job (v. 14) seemed to him to be an interminable assault on his body.¹

Job could not understand why God did not always judge overt sin quickly (24:1-12). Most people still have the same question. He mentioned three sins specifically: removing boundary landmarks and thereby appropriating someone else's land, stealing flocks of sheep, and mistreating the weak. Job could not see why God seemingly ignored the perpetrators of these terrible sins, yet afflicted him so severely. Neither could he understand why God did not judge sinners who practiced secret atrocities, specifically: murderers, adulterers, and burglars (24:14-17). Job cited examples from both country and city life.

"He [God] seems to him [Job] to be a God of absolute caprice, who punishes where there is no ground for punishment."²

Job's confidence 24:18-25

These confusing verses may seem to be saying that God does punish the wicked during their lifetime (vv. 18-21), and that the "mighty"—powerful, courageous citizens, either good or bad—have no guarantee or "assurance of life" in their God-given, yet tenuous, "security" (vv. 22-24). Probably Job was reflecting that God does indeed punish them in death if not in life.³ What bothered him was why God did not punish them sooner. Even with more revelation than Job enjoyed, we still have great difficulty understanding God's ways generally, and why He does what He does in specific individual lives particularly. God's wisdom is still unfathomable.

"His [Job's] complaint against God in this speech has been twofold: that he cannot win from God a declaration of his innocence, and that God himself has given up on governing his world."⁴

¹Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 599.

²Delitzsch, 2:12.

³Andersen, pp. 213-14.

⁴Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 618.

3. Bildad's third speech ch. 25

The brevity of this speech reflects the fact that Job's companions were running out of arguments.¹ Job's responses were at least silencing them, if not convincing them.

Bildad seems to have abandoned the earlier theme of the wicked person's fate, because of what Job had just pointed out. Instead, he merely emphasized the sinfulness and insignificance of all people, and God's greatness. Perhaps he hoped Job would admit to being a sinner, since the whole human race is unclean. He felt Job was absurd in thinking that he could argue before God.

Verse 4 restates a basic question that had come up earlier in the debate (4:17; 9:2b; 15:14). The answer did not come in this book, but it came later with subsequent good news of God's grace. Perhaps Bildad raised it here to convince Job that neither he nor anyone else could be as guiltless as Job claimed to be. The illustrations that follow in verses 5-6 support his point.

"Bildad's view of God's dominion and majesty in the heavens causes him to devalue mortal man as a maggot. He responds insensitively to Job by suggesting that Job does not need to wait until he dies to be grouped with the maggots (the same Hebrew word that Job used in 17:14). This was caustic sarcasm, for Job was in fact covered with worms (see 7:5)."²

"Bildad only reminds Job of the universal sinfulness of the human race once again, without direct accusation, in order that Job may himself derive from it the admonition to humble himself; and this admonition Job really needs, for his speeches are in many ways contrary to that humility which is still the duty of sinful man, even in connection with the best justified consciousness of right thoughts and actions towards the holy God [cf. ch. 31]."³

¹Andersen, p. 214.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 853.

³Delitzsch, 2:49.

Interestingly this last statement, the last of all those recorded in the book that Job's three friends uttered, is a very depressing one. These men had come to comfort Job, but their words and worldview made that impossible.

"The best way to help discouraged and hurting people is to listen with your heart and not just with your ears. It's not what they say but *why they say it* that is important. Let them know that you understand their pain by reflecting back to them *in different words* just what they say to you. Don't argue or try to convince them with logical reasoning. There will be time for that later; meanwhile, patiently accept their feelings—even their bitter words against God—and build bridges, not walls."¹

4. Job's third reply to Bildad chs. 26—27

Job's long speech here contrasts strikingly with Bildad's short preceding speech (ch. 25). In the first of these two chapters, Job addressed his remarks to Bildad's most recent comments. In the second, he broadened his view to include all three of his companions. The "you" in 26:2-4 is singular in Hebrew, but the "you" in 27:5 is plural.

Job's denunciation of Bildad's wisdom ch. 26

"Chapter 26 is one of the grandest recitals in the whole book. It is excelled only by the Lord's speeches, as is fitting. It sounds well in Job's mouth, and ends the dialogue, like the first movement of a symphony, with great crashing chords."²

Some scholars believe that verse 1 is an addition to the book introduced by a copyist, and that chapter 26 is really a continuation of Bildad's speech in chapter 25.³ I see no reason for abandoning the text as it stands with its ascription of chapter 26 to Job.

Job began by rebuking Bildad's attitude (vv. 2-4). Sarcastically he charged Bildad with the same weakness and inability Bildad had attributed to all men (vv. 2-3). Bildad's words were not profound but quite superficial (v. 4).

¹Wiersbe, pp. 35-36.

²Andersen, p. 216.

³E.g., Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 630.

"In what follows, Job now continues the description of God's exalted rule, which Bildad had attempted, by tracing it through every department of creation; and thus proves by fact, that he is wanting neither in a recognition nor reverence of God the almighty Ruler."¹

"These verses contain Job's harshest rejection of a friend's counsel."²

Next, Job picked up the theme of God's greatness that Bildad had introduced (vv. 5-14). Some commentators have understood this pericope to be the words of Bildad or Zophar. However, the lack of textual reference to either Bildad or Zophar, plus the content of the section, which is more consistent with Job's words than theirs, makes this an unattractive view.³ Job's beautiful description of God's omnipotence in these verses shows that he had a much larger concept of God than Bildad did (cf. 25:3, 5-6).

"Departed spirits" (v. 5) is literally *rephaim* in Hebrew. The Rephaim, meaning giants, identified both the mythical gods and human warlords of ancient Ugaritic (Canaanite) culture. They were the elite, and the Canaanites thought that those of them who had died were the most powerful and worthy of the dead.⁴ Job said these Rephaim trembled "under the waters" (i.e., in Sheol), because they are under God's authority. "Abaddon" is a poetic equivalent for Sheol (cf. v. 6; 28:23; 31:12; Ps. 88:11, NASB margin: "place of destruction"; Prov. 15:11; 27:20). Job viewed the earth as sustained only by God (v. 7).

"If the statement that God hangs the earth on nothing (see Gen. 1:2) refers to the suspension of earth in space, it preceded Newton's concept of gravitational attraction by thousands of years. Though this may ultimately be the divine intent, it is not clear that Job himself would have understood the complete meaning of his own words. He probably thought, as did other ancients, that the earth was a circular disk (see v.

¹Delitzsch, 2:51.

²Hartley, p. 362.

³See Andersen, p. 216.

⁴Conrad L'Heureax, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):265-74.

10) supported by nothing. In other words, he thought of the earth as floating on the vast subterranean waters."¹

God bottles the rain in clouds, but they do not break (v. 8). Probably the circle in view (v. 11) is the horizon that appears as a boundary for the sun. The "pillars of heaven" (v. 11) are doubtless the mountains that in one sense appear to hold up the sky. "Rahab" was a mythical sea monster that was symbolic of evil (cf. 9:13). The "fleeing serpent" (v. 13) is either a synonym for Rahab, or a reference to "the constellation of the Dragon."²

"God's power over and knowledge of Sheol, His creation of outer space and the earth, His control of the clouds, His demarcating of the realms of light and darkness, His shaking of the mountains, His quelling of the sea, His destruction of alleged opposing deities—to call these accomplishments the bare outlines or fragmentary sketches of God's activities [v. 14] gives an awareness of the vast immensity and incomprehensible infinity of God!"³

Job's denial of his friends' wisdom ch. 27

Since verse 1 begins, "Job again took up ...," Job may have paused and waited for Zophar to respond. However, we have no third speech by him in the book. Evidently Job proceeded to elaborate further on Bildad's "wisdom" but broadened his perspective and addressed all three friends. "You" in verses 5, 11, and 12 is plural in the Hebrew text.

Job began by reaffirming his innocence (vv. 1-6). For the first time he took an oath that his words were true. "As God lives" (v. 2) means that what he was saying was as certain as God's existence.

"Since they [his friends] were wrong, Job assumed he was right. That is where Job made his mistake. The fact that his friends were wrong in no way made Job right. Job should have been in the presence of God where there would have been a

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 854.

² Delitzsch, 2:59-61.

³ Zuck, *Job*, p. 119.

brokenness of spirit. One of the purposes of trouble in our lives is to lead us into that brokenness of spirit before God."¹

Job wished that his enemies would suffer the fate of the wicked (vv. 7-23). In so saying, Job was claiming that he was on the side of the righteous, and all who were against him were wicked. Rowley regarded this section as Zophar's third speech.² Clines believed that Zophar was speaking in 27:7-10, 13-17; 24:18-24; and 27:18-23.³ However, Job could have said everything in this chapter.

"Imprecatory rhetoric [v. 7] is difficult for Westerners to understand. But in the Semitic world it is still an honorable rhetorical device. The imprecation had a juridical function and was frequently a hyperbolic (cf. Ps. 109:6-15; 139 [*sic* 137]:7-9) means of dealing with false accusations and oppression. Legally the false accusation and the very crimes committed are called down on the perpetrator's head. Since his counselors had falsely accused Job of being wicked, they deserved to be punished like the wicked."⁴

Other writers have regarded verses 13-23 as Zophar's third speech.⁵ Still, this section is consistent with Job's argument in the immediate context (vv. 7-10) and previously (24:18-25).

"In the following strophe [poetic paragraph: vv. 13-23] Job now begins as Zophar (ch. xx. 29) concluded. He gives back to the friends the doctrine they have fully imparted to him. They have held the lot of the evil-doer before him as a mirror, that he may behold himself in it and be astounded; he holds it before them, that they may perceive how not only his bearing under suffering, but also the form of his affliction, is of a totally different kind."⁶

Job asserted that the wicked would experience punishment eventually. Though he believed God was not being just with him, he could not escape

¹McGee, 2:634.

²Rowley, p. 175.

³Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 663.

⁴Smick, "Job," p. 971.

⁵E.g., H. L. Ellison, *A Study of Job*, p. 88; Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 99.

⁶Delitzsch, 2:72.

the conviction that God must deal justly. It was this antinomy (the apparent inconsistency between two apparently reasonable facts) that made Job so uncomfortably anxious to obtain a reply from God. He agreed with his companions that God punishes the wicked. This is what normally happens in life (vv. 13-23). Nonetheless he disagreed that this is always true in every case.

"We can sum up the methods of his friends. Eliphaz was the voice of experience. He used what would be called today the psychological approach. This is the approach of the power of positive thinking. It adopts a cheerful attitude. Bildad was the traditionalist and he used the philosophical approach. This would be the approach of several of the seminaries today. They use the philosophical approach, but that doesn't help anyone. Zophar was a religious dogmatist. He thought he knew all about God. He sounds like some of us fundamentalists, by the way. All of us would fall into the category of one of these friends. As we have seen, not one of his friends had been able to help him."¹

E. JOB'S CONCLUDING SOLILOQUIES CHS. 28—31

Job's three friends had nothing more to say, but Job did. He continued to talk about God's wisdom (ch. 28) and to defend his own innocence (chs. 29—31).

1. Job's discourse on God's wisdom ch. 28

Because the speech in this chapter is more soliloquy than dialogue, some scholars have concluded that someone other than Job spoke it: Zophar, Bildad, or God. Clines assigned chapter 28 to Elihu and believed that it should follow chapters 32—37.² Andersen argued for it's being a speech by none of the characters, but a composition by the storyteller in which he expressed his own point of view.³

¹McGee, 2:636.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, pp. 708-9, 887.

³Andersen, pp. 222-29. Cf. Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 278.

Many scholars also view this chapter as out of place because the main subject in the preceding chapters has been the *justice* of God, but now in this chapter the subject is *wisdom*. This discourse has appeared to them, therefore, as coming from the mouth of someone other than Job. The subject matter, however, is in harmony with what Job had said previously (cf. 9:10-11; 12:13; 17:10; 23:8-10; 26:14). It seems to me that wisdom is a larger issue that lies behind the problem of God's justice. If only people could find wisdom, they could understand God's justice. For this reason, I believe that Job probably spoke these words.

"Chapter 28, a wisdom hymn, may be a kind of interlude which marks the transition between the two major parts of the poetic body—the previous dialogue between Job and his friends, and the forth-coming long discourses by Job (chaps. 29—31), Elihu (chaps. 32—37), and God (chaps. 38—41) which are almost monologues."¹

In this chapter, Job summarized his stance before God. Rather than being in rebellion against God, as his friends accused, Job claimed that he feared God and sought to depart from evil (v. 28).

"Job has laid hold of supreme truth; that life's problems begin to find solution only when God is set foremost, made supreme, and trusted."²

Job continued to follow the instruction he had received while growing up, namely, that people should trust and obey God because He governs the world in infinite wisdom.³ The fact that Job believed God was unjust—in his case—did not mean that he had abandoned faith in God completely.

"The internal structure of chapter 28 is as follows:

Introduction (vv. 1-2): All treasure has a source

I. First stanza (vv. 3-11): The discovery of treasure

Refrain and response (vv. 12-14): Wisdom is elusive

¹Parsons, p. 141.

²Blaiklock, p. 309.

³Robert Laurin, "The Theological Structure of Job," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):86-89.

- II. Second stanza (vv. 15-19): Wisdom as treasure
Refrain and response (vv. 20-22): Wisdom is elusive
- III. Third stanza (vv. 23-27): God and wisdom
Conclusion (v. 28): The source of wisdom"¹

The point of Job's soliloquy is this: People have been extremely clever and industrious in exploring, discovering, and extracting earth's richest physical resources. Nonetheless, they have not been able to do so with what is even more essential to their welfare, namely, wisdom (cf. Prov. 3:13-18). The reason for this is that wisdom does not lie hidden in the earth but in the person of God. The key to obtaining that wisdom is orienting oneself properly toward God.

"We are paying billions of dollars to bring back rocks from the moon. Those are mighty expensive rocks, friends. But they are not telling man what he would like to know."²

"... solemnly, and without vaunting himself over his accusers, he [Job] affirms his innocence; earnestly, but in a winning manner, he admonishes them, by tempering and modifying what was vehement and extreme in his previous replies. He humbly submits himself to the divine wisdom, by setting the fear of God, as man's true wisdom, before himself and the friends as their common aim."³

Verse 5b probably means that mining produces a mixture of rubble, just as a fire does.⁴ The essence of wisdom is to fear (treat with reverential trust) the Lord (Master) and to depart from evil (v. 28). We know this only by supernatural revelation ("to mankind He said"). We can never plumb the depths of God's wisdom. However, we can experience wisdom partially as we adore and obey God—making Him, rather than self, the center of our lives, and allowing Him to regulate our lives. Job was obviously well acquainted with various kinds of mining operations. There were mines in

¹Smick, "Architectonics, Structured ...," p. 91.

²McGee, 2:635.

³Delitzsch, 2:117.

⁴Rowley, p. 228.

the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, Idumea, Aramea, Lebanon, and elsewhere as early as the patriarchal period.¹

In this speech, Job demonstrated that his understanding of wisdom was greater than that of his three friends. It was a rebuke of their shortsighted wisdom.² In chapter 28, Job gave evidence that he *did* fear God. In chapter 29, he proceeded to give evidence that he also turned away from evil. Consequently, 28:28 is a hinge and connecting link (cf. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). It is also "one of the great climactic moments in the Book."³

"The object of the section, ch. xxviii., is primarily to confirm the assertion concerning the judgment that befalls the evil-doer, ch. xxvii. 13-23; the confirmation is, however, at the same time, according to the delicately laid plan of the poet, a glorious general confession, in which Job's dialogue with the friends comes to a close. This panegyric [speech or text in praise of someone or something] of wisdom (similar to Paul's panegyric of charity, 1 Cor. xiii.) is the presentation of Job's predominant principle, and as such, is like a song of triumph, with which, without vain-glory, he closes the dialogue in the most appropriate manner."⁴

2. Job's defense of his innocence ch. 29—31

Job gave a soliloquy before his dialogue with his three friends began (ch. 3). Now he concluded that dialogue with two soliloquies (chs. 28 and 29—31). In this second of the bracketing two, Job longed for his past state of blessedness (ch. 29), lamented his present misery (ch. 30), and reaffirmed his innocence, calling on God to vindicate him in the future (ch. 31). This whole discourse is a kind of concluding summary of his case, and he delivered it as if he were in court. He made no reference to his three companions in it.

"Job has decided how he will rest his case. He takes a daring step in a final attempt to clear himself. He swears an avowal of innocence. His oath forces the issue, for the oath compels

¹Delitzsch, 2:86-91. See also Clines, *Job 21—37*, pp. 918-19.

²Archer, p. 463.

³Reichert, p. 145.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:116.

God either to clear him or to activate the curses. Even if God continues to remain silent, that would be an answer, for if the curses Job utters are not activated, the entire community would be convinced that Job is innocent. So after swearing this avowal of innocence, Job will sit in silence, awaiting God's answer."¹

Job's past blessedness ch. 29

"Chapter 29 is another classic example of Semitic rhetoric with all the elements of good symmetrical style... The pattern is as follows:

Blessing, vv. 2-6

Honor, vv. 7-11

Job's benevolence, vv. 12-17

Blessing, vv. 18-20

Honor, vv. 21-25 ...

Job in asserting his benevolence places a description of it in the climatic position in this oration, with the key line (v. 14) in the exact middle of the poem."²

"We will find in this chapter of twenty verses Job uses the personal pronoun 'I' or 'me' fifty-two times. ... Job is wrapped up in himself. That is his big problem."³

Another way to divide this chapter is into two sections. In verses 1-11 Job longed for the former days, and in verses 12-25 he explained why he had enjoyed them.

Job's fellowship with God evidently meant the most to him since he mentioned this blessing first (vv. 2-5a). "When the Almighty was still with me" (v. 5) means when God had displayed His favor to Job in the past (cf. Gen. 28:20). Cream and oil (v. 6) were symbols of prosperity. The rock (v.

¹Hartley, p. 385.

²Smick, "Architectonics, Structured ...," pp. 92-93.

³McGee, 2:636.

6b) may refer to an olive press or perhaps to the rocky soil out of which olive trees grew.

In verse 7, Job turned from his former domestic bliss to his former social happiness, the chief characteristic of which was his honor. Verses 7 through 10 picture what was probably his daily routine.¹ Unlike God's present treatment of him, Job had assisted the injured and had punished oppressors (v. 17). Most translators have rendered the Hebrew word *hol* at the end of verse 18 "sand," but at least two writers argued that it refers to the mythical phoenix bird.² Verses 18 through 20 describe what Job had felt entitled to expect in his former prosperity. Job had also provided encouragement and comfort for the despondent (vv. 24-25), in contrast to his friends.

"Job's review of his life [in this chapter] is one of the most important documents in Scripture for the study of Israelite ethics."³

"Fifty-two times he has used 'I' and 'me.' We hear no confession, no admission of failure. We see nothing of a broken and contrite spirit in Job."⁴

Job's present misery ch. 30

"Chapter 29 speaks of what the Lord gave to Job [in the past] and chapter 30 speaks of what the Lord took away [in the present] (cf. 1:21)."⁵

Job was presently without respect (vv. 1-15), disregarded (vv. 16-23), and despondent (vv. 24-31). He had formerly enjoyed the respect of the most respectable, but now he experienced the contempt of the most contemptible (vv. 1-15; cf. 29:8, 21-25).⁶

"The lengthy description of these good-for-nothing fathers [vv. 1-8] is a special brand of rhetoric. The modern Western

¹Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 985.

²Delitzsch, 2:127-32; Henry Heras, "The Standard of Job's Immortality," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (1949):263-79.

³Andersen, p. 230.

⁴McGee, 2:638.

⁵Zuck, *Job*, p. 129.

⁶Andersen, p. 235.

mind prefers understatement, so when Semitic literature indulges in overstatement, such hyperbole becomes a mystery to the average Western reader. To define every facet of their debauchery, to state it in six different ways, is not meant to glory in it but to heighten the pathetic nature of his dishonor."¹

"What are described in these verses [vv. 1-8] are not wicked people but desperately poor people for whom there is no place in regular human society."²

McGee had little sympathy for Job:

"I don't know about you, but I am tired of listening to Job. First he was boasting about the outstanding man he had been. Now he is courting sympathy. 'I was such a great fellow and now look at me.' And who is to blame for this, my friend? Why, God is to blame."³

God loosed His bowstring against Job (v. 11a) by shooting an arrow at him (i.e., by afflicting him). Another way to read the Hebrew of this part of verse 11 is that God, or Job's enemies, had loosed Job's bowstring, that is, He, or they, had incapacitated or disarmed him.⁴ Job's enemies cast off the figurative bridle that had previously restrained them in their contacts with him (v. 11b). Job described his soul as poured out within him (v. 16) in the sense that he felt drained of all zest for life.⁵ Verse 18 probably means he felt that God was grabbing him by the lapels, so to speak, or perhaps that his sickness had discolored, rather than disheveled, his clothing.

"There is no call to see here [in v. 19] a reference to the appearance of Job's body, covered with scabs as if with the dirt of the ground (as Davidson, Peake). Nor is it that God has sullied him with dirt (as in 9:31). It is simply that God has utterly humiliated him, and thrown his honor to the ground."⁶

¹Smick, "Architectonics, Structured ...," p. 93.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 1001.

³McGee, 2:638-39.

⁴See Clines, *Job 21—37*, pp. 1003-4.

⁵Pope, p. 222.

⁶Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 1007.

Verse 28 evidently refers to Job's emotional state, whereas verse 30 refers to his physical condition, even though the Hebrew words translated "mourning" (v. 28) and "black" (v. 30) are similar in meaning. The Hebrew words translated "comfort" (v. 28) and "fever" (v. 30) are also very close together in meaning. Job's mental anguish exceeded his physical agony.

"Job is desperately seeking to arouse God's sympathy for him."¹

"He justifies himself instead of justifying God. In fact, he blames God. What is the problem of Job? It is pride."²

Job's continuing innocence ch. 31

As was common in ancient Near Eastern judicial cases, Job concluded his summary defense with an oath of innocence. He did so in the form of a negative confession complete with self-imprecations.³ He concluded with a challenge to God to present His charges in writing (vv. 35-37). Job's idea was that if God remained silent this would be a vindication of his innocence. However, if he had been guilty, God would have to intervene and impose the punishment Job had designated.⁴ Note the frequent repetition of the phrase, "If I have ..." and its equivalents (vv. 5, 7, 9, 13, 16, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 29, 39).

"Job has been doing a good job of patting himself on the back. He has told what an outstanding, influential, good man he was and then makes a play for sympathy for his present condition. As he concludes his discourse in this chapter, he is still claiming that he is a very good fellow."⁵

"Chapter 31 as to its literary format is a negative testament by which Job will close the matter of whether he is being punished for his sins. After such a statement, in the jurisprudence of the ancient Near East, the burden of proof fell on the court. That is why verse 40 says, 'The words of Job are

¹Hartley, p. 400.

²McGee, 2:639.

³Parsons, p. 141. Cf. Michael Brennan Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979):42, 47.

⁴Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 164.

⁵McGee, 2:640.

ended.' Each disavowal had to be accompanied by an oath that called for the same punishment the offense deserved on the basis of the principle of *lex talionis* [the law of equal compensation] (vv. 5-10). Because the charges against Job were wide and varied, he must give a similarly wide disavowal. He had already done this in a general way (cf. 23:10-12), but now he specifies and calls for condemnation and punishment from both God and man (vv. 8, 11, 12, 14, 22, 23) if he is guilty of any of these sins."¹

Here we have proof that Job really was "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil" (1:1). Now we understand better why God could boast about Job to Satan (1:8; 2:3). We also see how groundless were his friends' criticisms of him. This chapter is one of the most remarkable descriptions of what it means to be a righteous person that we have in the Bible. It should challenge every reader to compare his or her own commitment to God to Job's.

Job did what Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said that God expects obedience to the *spirit* of His law, not just obedience to the *letter* of it (cf. Matt. 5:21-48). Job's behavior reflects obedience to some of the Ten Commandments, but he never referred to them, which might have been natural if he had been an Israelite who lived after the giving of the Mosaic Law.

Job began by explaining the principles by which he had lived (vv. 1-4). He claimed purity from ethical defilement in two ways. He referred to the binding covenant he had made with his eyes (v. 1). Then he used the oath form "if such and such be true then" (sometimes not stated) let thus and so happen (vv. 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 13, 16, 19, 20 [twice], 21-22, 24, 25, 26, 38, 39-40).

"The making of a covenant with his eyes is not merely a promise not to lust after a girl [though it includes that]. The sin he has in mind is far more fundamental, or it would not have commanded this position in the poem. Job is emphatically denying an insidious and widespread form of idolatry: devotion to the *betula*, 'the maiden,' the goddess of fertility. This Venus of the Semitic world was variously known as the Maiden Anat

¹Smick, "Architectonics, Structured ...," p. 94. Cf. Hartley, p. 406.

in Ugaritic, Ashtoreth in preexilic Israel, and Ishtar in Babylonian sources, wherein she is described as 'laden with vitality, charm and voluptuousness.' She is probably the 'Queen of Heaven' mentioned in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:16-19."¹

"Those that would keep their hearts pure must guard their eyes, which are both the outlets and inlets of uncleanness."²

Delitzsch extrapolated from verse 1 that Job was a monogamist.³ If so, he was even superior to Abraham in this aspect of his righteousness.

Most of the 14 sins that Job mentioned in this chapter were not heinous crimes but relatively minor deviations from the ethical ideal. They were covert rather than overt iniquities. Thus Job claimed innocence on the highest level of morality (cf. Matt. 5:27-28). Note also that he continued to assume that God punishes the wicked (vv. 2-3).

"He is still pointing his finger at others who commit such things, and he says they are to be judged. He cannot see why he should be judged so severely when he is such a wonderful fellow. He is about to break his arm patting himself on the back."⁴

"As a consequence of his suffering, Job viewed man's relationship to God as being based on God's sovereign caprice; therefore man could hope for happiness only by adhering to an ethical rightness superior to God's whereby he could demand vindication (Job 31; cf. 35:2b)."⁵

In verse 9, Job claimed that he had not lusted after an inappropriate woman (cf. Exod. 20:17). Verse 10a may describe Job's wife grinding corn with a hard millstone, which was the work of a slave. Verse 10b euphemistically describes men overpowering her sexually. Some interpreters believe that in

¹Smick, "Architectonics, Structured ...," p. 96.

²Henry, p. 557.

³Delitzsch, 2:173.

⁴McGee, 2:640.

⁵Parsons, p. 144.

view of 10b, we should understand 10a to refer to sexual "grinding" in intercourse.¹

"His hypothetical adultery would in Hebrew eyes be an offence against her husband, and so another's adultery with his wife would be a similar offence against him. In Hebrew law adultery always involved a married woman. The marital state of the man was immaterial."²

Fundamentally, adultery involves a married man *or* a married woman (cf. Lev. 20:10), but in Israel, as well as in Roman society, infidelity by the husband was not commonly viewed as constituting adultery.³

Job's words about adultery (vv. 9-12) are classic and reveal righteous abhorrence of that sin. Likewise, his statements regarding the importance of treating slaves as human beings (vv. 13-15) reveal Job's fear of God and love for his fellowman. He respected human life highly (vv. 16-23). All his life he had taken care of the poor and needy, and he had not taken advantage of the vulnerable, such as orphans and widows. Job further claimed that he had not taken excessive delight in possessions, and was not an idolater (vv. 24-28).

"His friends have led him into a defense of himself and he just can't let up. He must boast about his goodness."⁴

"The phrase ["]my hand threw a kiss from my mouth["], v. 27] reflects the apparent ancient custom of kissing the hand as a prelude to the superstitious and idolatrous act of throwing a kiss to the heavenly bodies."⁵

He had not rejoiced when his enemies suffered, and had not withheld hospitality from strangers (vv. 29-32). Neither had he covered up his sins (been hypocritical; vv. 33-34; cf. Gen. 3:7-8; Ps. 32:3).

¹E.g., Delitzsch, 2:179.

²Rowley, p. 200.

³See *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Adultery," pp. 24-25.

⁴McGee, 2:640.

⁵*The Nelson ...*, p. 860.

"Here then is either a very clean conscience or a very calloused one."¹

"He is boasting of all the things that he has done. I believe he really did them, too, but he is lifted up with pride about it. That is where he is in trouble. He is constantly saying, in effect, 'I have been so good that God is unjust in treating me as He is. God is wrong.'"²

Job's cry for a hearer of his claims (v. 35) probably implied God rather than the mediator he had requested earlier (16:19; 19:25; cf. 30:20).³

"An examination of biblical and extra-biblical legal documents establishes v. 35 as a dependent's official appeal before a third party for a civil hearing at which the judge would compel the plaintiff to formalize his accusations and to present any supporting evidence. As we shall see, this request was ordinarily made only after all attempts at informal arbitration had been exhausted and was often accompanied by a sworn statement of innocence. In Job 31 the oath of innocence has been expanded to embrace the entire chapter."⁴

"How totally different from Adam, who was obliged to be drawn out of his hiding-place, and tremblingly, because conscious of guilt, underwent the examination of the omniscient God!"⁵

His "adversary," in verse 35, was also God (cf. 13:24; 16:9; 19:11). We should probably understand "owners" (v. 39) as "workers."

Having ended his final summation in defense of his innocence, Job rested his case and waited for God's verdict. This is another climax in the book. Job had claimed innocence in his personal life (vv. 1-12), toward his neighbor (vv. 13-20), and toward God (vv. 24-34; cf. 1:11). Job's friends believed that God always punishes sin. Therefore, Job was a sinner. Job

¹Andersen, p. 244.

²McGee, 2:641.

³Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 1033.

⁴Dick, p. 38.

⁵Delitzsch, 2:197.

believed that God was punishing him when he was innocent. Therefore, God was unfair.

F. ELIHU'S SPEECHES CHS. 32—37

Some critical scholars believe that a later editor inserted chapters 32—37 in the text of Job.¹ Many conservatives believe there is ample external and internal evidence indicating that this section of chapters fits into the argument of the book.²

"... the Elihu speeches (chaps. 32—37), which seemingly interrupt the argument of the book, actually set the stage for the Yahweh speeches. Elihu appears as a type of mediator (an impartial witness) who speaks on behalf of God (36:2) by rebuking the three friends (cf. 32:3, 6-14; 34:2-15; cf. 35:4) and by suggesting that Job needed to repent of his pride which developed because of his suffering (cf. 33:17; 35:12-16). He recommended that Job should exalt God's works which are evident in nature (36:24—37:18) and fear Him who comes in golden splendor out of the north (37:22-24). These basic ideas of Elihu are either assumed or developed by the Lord in His speeches."³

1. The introduction of Elihu 32:1-5

A short prose pericope (32:1-6a) breaks into the poetic body of the book. Its purpose is to introduce Elihu, as the prose prologue to the whole book (chs. 1—2) introduced the other characters.

Elihu ("He is My God") may have been a relative of Abraham, since a man named Buz was a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Gen. 22:20-21), and Elihu was a Buzite (cf. Jer. 25:23). A man named Ram (v. 2) was

¹See William Ewart Staples, *The Speeches of Elihu: A Study of Job XXXII-XXXVII*, pp. 12-24, and David Noel Freedman, "The Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job," *Harvard Theological Review* 61:1 (January 1968):51-59, for support of this view. See John Peter Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 4. *Chronicles-Job*, pp. 268-73, for a summary of the arguments with rebuttals.

²See Larry J. Waters, "The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32—37," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):28-41.

³Parsons, p. 141.

an ancestor of David (Ruth 4:19-22). Delitzsch believed that Elihu was an Aramean Arab.¹ Clines favored his being an Edomite.² Elihu is the only friend of Job's whose family lineage is given, suggesting that he was important for some reason. The name of Elihu's father Barachel means "God Blesses" or "May God Bless."

Elihu was angry. The writer mentioned his burning anger four times in these verses (vv. 2 [twice], 3, 5). He was angry with Job because Job considered himself right and God wrong. This is the meaning of "he justified himself before God" (v. 2). Furthermore, he was angry with Job's three companions because they had failed to prove Job worthy of God's punishment (v. 3). One writer suggested that Elihu served as a covenant mediator between Job and God (cf. 9:33; 16:19-22; 19:21).³

2. Elihu's first speech 32:6—33:33

Before Elihu began presenting his views (ch. 33), he first had to gain the attention of his elders and explain why he wanted to speak (32:6-22).

"In the ancient Orient, where age is synonymous with wisdom, the young were not expected to participate in the deliberations of their elders, let alone interrupt their discussion."⁴

"Elihu's discourse, which fills no less than six chapters, has been criticized as verbose and as the speech of a conceited young man, disrespectful in its tone and adding nothing to the argument. A more careful reading refutes this unkindly misjudgment. It is the most courteous speech of the debate, and undoubtedly surpasses all the preceding speeches in spiritual grasp. It moves on a higher level than the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. What is most of all important, however, in relation to the problem under discussion, is that it

¹Delitzsch, 2:207.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 713.

³H. D. Beeby, "Elihu—Job's Mediator." *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 7:2 (October 1965):33-54.

⁴Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 287.

introduces three new factors. First, there is a new *approach*. Second, there is a new *answer*. Third, there is a new *appeal*.¹

Elihu's reasons for speaking 32:6-22

Elihu began by voicing his respect for Job's three friends (vv. 6-10). They were older than he, and for this reason, he said, he had refrained from speaking until now. However, he had become convinced that advancing age does not always increase wisdom. Rather, wisdom comes from God. "But it is a spirit is in mankind" and "the breath of the Almighty" (v. 8) may refer to the Spirit of God (cf. Gen. 41:38-39; Exod. 31:3; Num. 27:18-21; Isa. 11:2; Dan. 5:11-12). Alternatively, these terms may refer to the life spirit that is in all people, breathed into humanity at creation (cf. Gen. 2:7).²

Elihu was saying that Job's three friends were not wise. To get them to listen in spite of what he had just said, he asked ten times that they pay attention to his words (vv. 10, 20; 33:1, 12, 31, 33; 34:2, 10, 16; 37:14). He set himself up as still another wise man—wiser than his elders.

"Almost all modern interpreters have found Elihu to be insufferably wordy. ... This loquacious style to some degree makes all the speeches in chapter 3—41 difficult for the modern reader to appreciate."³

"His professed modesty is belied by his self-importance and pomposity."⁴

The ancients in the Near Eastern world esteemed rhetoric and elaborate wording.

Elihu proceeded to evaluate Job's three friends further (vv. 11-14). They had failed to refute Job. They believed they were right, and that since Job had failed to repent, God was the only Person who could convince him that he was a sinner (v. 13). However, Job had not refuted Elihu, who planned to use different arguments to persuade his hearers (v. 14).

¹Baxter, 3:55.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 718.

³Smick, "Job," p. 1002.

⁴Rowley, p. 207.

"Elihu cuts straight to the heart of Job's problem. Job had been treating God as though he were God's equal. Since God is greater than man, Elihu asks: Why do you contend or 'file a lawsuit' against God? Job had been treating God as though He were merely a human who could be held accountable in court (see 34:23)."¹

Elihu explained to Job why he wanted to speak (vv. 15-22). Among other reasons, he was going to talk because his elders had fallen silent. "The spirit within" (v. 18) Elihu was probably his own human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, in view of what he proceeded to say (vv. 19-20).

Elihu's first response to Job ch. 33

"In the next four chapters (33—36 inclusive) Elihu proceeds to unburden himself. He cites Job's three major contentions in order to refute them: (1) that he is innocent (33:8, 9); (2) that God's persecution is therefore an act of wanton power and injustice (33:10-11); and (3) that God has ignored his suffering by refusing to answer him (33:12-13). In accordance with Semitic usage, Elihu proceeds to answer these arguments in reverse order."²

Chapter 33 contains Elihu's attempt to explain to Job why God was not responding to him. In summary, he told Job that God was not silent, as Job had charged, but that He was speaking through dreams and sickness to Job. Rather than using suffering to punish Job for his sins, God was using it to prevent him from dying. Elihu said God was being merciful to Job. The three counselors had said the purpose of suffering was punitive. Job's wife, before them, had said Job was suffering because God was unfair. Now Elihu offered a third solution: God was trying to teach Job something. He said the purpose of suffering was educational.³

"The key to his [Elihu's] position in this speech, and what marks him out from the other interlocutors, is his conviction that suffering is a means of divine communication with

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 861.

² Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 105. Paragraph division omitted.

³ See the chart "Job's Counseling Sessions" in *The Nelson ...*, p. 839.

humans. He does not abandon the concept of suffering as retribution, but he displaces it with the idea of education."¹

Verses 1-7 record Elihu's request that Job hear him out. Elihu was more courteous and sympathetic than the three friends, as seen in his addressing Job by name (v. 1), which the friends did not do. In verse 5, Elihu is addressing Job individually. Elihu next summarized what Job had said (vv. 8-13).

"According to Elihu, Job's position is that (1) he is faultless (v 9), and that (2) God's afflictions of him are therefore expressions of groundless hatred and enmity (vv 10-11), and that (3) God refuses to answer his complaints of unjust treatment (v 13)."²

Job had indeed maintained his own righteousness at the expense of God's justice. Elihu explained that God spoke, not only in dreams and visions (vv. 14-18), but also through pain (vv. 19-28).

"We must recognize that since we have the completed Bible, we do not need to trust any dream that we have had. However, way out on the frontier where the gospel has not gone, I think you will find that God still uses this method."³

Job had had dreams (7:14) that, Elihu suggested, should have kept Job from improper actions and attitudes, specifically, pride that would be sinful and would lead to his death (33:17). In sickness and pain God brings people closer to death. This leads them to evaluate their lives and, if they respond properly, to grow in their relationship with Him.

"God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁴

The angels are God's agents in bringing both sickness and restoration to people (v. 23; cf. 5:1; 9:33). The "ransom" (v. 24) probably refers to the

¹Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 742.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 727.

³McGee, 2:645.

⁴C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 81.

sick person's deliverance. Seeing the light (v. 28) means being kept alive. Verses 29-33 summarize Elihu's argument.

"Unfortunately like so many well-meaning messengers of grace, Elihu was so fully convinced of his good intentions toward Job that he became insufferably overbearing."¹

"Elihu did, however, perceive the significance of the all-important principle of God's free grace, which the others had slighted."²

Elihu's views contrasted with those of the three friends as follows:

The three friends	Elihu
Sin leads to suffering.	Suffering leads to sin.
Suffering is retributive.	Suffering is protective.
Suffering is punitive.	Suffering is educational.
Job should repent.	Job should learn.
Job should initiated restoration.	God had initiated restoration.

Who was correct: Elihu or the three friends? Other Scriptures indicate that God uses suffering both to punish sinners and to produce spiritual growth. In some cases, He may have one purpose in view, and in other cases, another. On the other hand, both Elihu and the three friends were wrong in some of what they said. Job was not a great sinner, and God sometimes intervenes personally and directly in human experience.

Job did not respond to Elihu's speech. This is unusual, since he replied to his three friends' speeches and to God's speeches. Perhaps Job was silent here, because he did not know how to respond to Elihu and was overwhelmed by his arguments.³ Or, perhaps, he was processing what Elihu had said when Elihu began speaking again. Elihu had made a distinction that

¹Smick, "Job," p. 1007.

²Kline, p. 483.

³Delitzsch, 2:241.

the three friends had not made. He distinguished God's punishment from His chastisement.

"... the wicked and the good do not stand in the same relation to God, as objects of benevolence; but that the one He punishes to testify his disapprobation and satisfy his justice, and the other He chastises to bring them nearer to Himself."¹

Elihu viewed God's attitude toward Job more like that of a loving father than that of an impartial judge.

3. Elihu's second speech ch. 34

In this speech Elihu sought to refute Job's charge that God was unjust. He tried to answer Job's question: Why doesn't God have mercy on me? He first addressed the three friends (vv. 10-15, plural "you" in Hebrew) and then spoke to Job (vv. 16-27, singular "you"). In his first speech Elihu had alluded to Eliphaz's arguments. In this one he took up Bildad's (vv. 2, 34).

"Here the theme is no longer the educative role of suffering, and Elihu's manner has lost some of its expository tone. The theme becomes rather the rebelliousness of Job against the divine justice, and the manner becomes correspondingly more assertive and dogmatic."²

"The argument in both movements [vv. 2-15 and 16-37] is the same: God, as the supreme governor of the universe, cannot do wrong by failing to requite good and bad behavior appropriately, whereas Job, who is claiming that God has treated him unjustly, is doing wrong by implying that God has perverted justice."³

Job's plea of innocence 34:1-9

Elihu reminded the three older counselors that Job had claimed to be innocent of transgressions (cf. 13:18, 23; 14:17; 23:11; 27:2, 6). Then he

¹Hodge, 1:418.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 766.

³*Ibid.*, p. 767.

sided with them and agreed that Job was guilty of sin, for which God could punish him justly.

Elihu's defense of God's justice 34:10-37

Like the three friends, Elihu believed God was acting perfectly justly in allowing Job to suffer, and that Job was insolent to accuse God of being unjust (v. 10). He then reviewed God's character to illustrate His justice (vv. 11-30).

"Elihu [in vv. 10-15] repeats the self-evident truth that God can do no wrong. He attaches three thoughts to this proposition. First, he infers from God's supremacy as Creator that He is not accountable to anyone (13). This takes us to the edge of a dangerous cliff. For, if everything God does is right, by definition, and if, because He is Sovereign, God does everything that happens, it follows that everything that happens is right, and the category of evil disappears. Secondly, verses 14 and 15 specify that every living thing depends on God for its being, so that He may, indiscriminately or universally, withdraw this gift of existence and do nothing wrong. This is a fine acknowledgment of God as owner of all, and a fine tribute to His might. But it leaves no grounds for saying that any act of God is 'good' rather than 'bad'. 'Might makes right' is the upshot of Elihu's doctrine, and in this emphasis he approaches rather closely to Job's contention. But he wriggles out of the difficulty by falling back on the doctrine that God requites every person according to his behaviour (11), stating it in crass individualistic terms. But this is the very thing under debate, and no answer to the problem."¹

The keynote of the theme of this speech—that God has the right to govern His universe—is the rhetorical question in verse 17a: "Shall one who hates justice rule?"²

Delitzsch summarized Elihu's view in this section as follows:

¹Andersen, p. 253.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 782.

"There is ... a divine love which has called the world into being and keeps it in being; and this love, as the perfect opposite of sovereign caprice, is a pledge for the absolute righteousness of the divine rule."¹

Elihu asserted, in contrast to Job's beliefs, that God's creative order excludes all partiality (vv. 16-20), and His omniscience qualifies Him to be an impartial judge (vv. 21-23). Therefore, God was not answerable to anyone, including Job (vv. 31-37; cf. v. 13). In this section, Elihu became very heavy-handed (cf. vv. 33, 36). Some sin that Job had committed had brought on his suffering, Elihu concluded, but Job's consequent rebellion against God made him doubly guilty (v. 37).

Much of what Elihu said in this speech was true. Nevertheless, as the other critics, he incorrectly assumed Job was lying about his innocence. As we know from the first two chapters, Job was not suffering greatly because he had sinned greatly.

"In Israel the ban on idols placed restrictions on the decorative visual arts. The prohibition of ritualized myths was another part of the campaign against paganism and prevented the development of drama in Israel. As a result the prime media for artistic expression were music, with song and dance, and the spoken word. In all these Israel excelled. Nothing was esteemed more highly than a word fitly spoken (Pr. 25:11). It was savoured by the ear *as the palate tastes food* (Jb. 34:3). Such art could easily become decadent, when the form was prized for its own sake, rather than as an expression of truth. Elihu's speeches tend to come under this condemnation."²

Hebrews 12:7 seems to summarize Elihu's point of view well: "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

"If we confine our attention to the real substance of the speech, apart from the emotional and rough accessories, Elihu cast back the reproach of injustice which Job has raised, first as being contradictory to the being of God, ch. xxxiv. 10 sq.;

¹Delitzsch, 2:252.

²Andersen, p. 251.

then he seeks to refute it as contradicting God's government ... It is worthy of recognition, that ... his [Elihu's] theodicy [defense of God] differs essentially from that proclaimed by the friends. It is not derived from mere appearance, but lays hold of the very principles."¹

4. Elihu's third speech ch. 35

We could chart the differences in Elihu's first three speeches this way:

Elihu's speech	Job's question that Elihu responded to	Job's charge that Elihu sought to refute
First	Why doesn't God respond to me?	God is insensitive (ch. 33).
Second	Why doesn't God relieve me?	God is unjust (ch. 34).
Third	Why doesn't God reward me?	Holiness is unprofitable (ch. 35).

Job felt that God should have rewarded him for his innocence, rather than subjecting him to suffering. Elihu replied that man's sin or innocence does not affect God, and God was silent to Job because Job was proud. As before, Elihu first quoted Job (vv. 1-3) and then refuted his statement (vv. 4-16).

Job's position of indifference 35:1-3

Job had said that living a righteous life does not benefit a person, since God does not consistently bless the righteous and punish the wicked in this life (9:22, 30-31; cf. 34:9; 35:3). Elihu thought this assertion was hardly a sign of Job's innocence. In verse 2, "more than God's" (AV, NASB) is clearer if we read "before God" (HCSB, ESV, NRSV, NET2).² The TNIV has a good rendering: "You say, 'I am in the right, not God.'"

¹Delitzsch, 2:266.

²AV stands for *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*.

Elihu's defense of God's freedom 35:4-16

Elihu made two responses to what he inferred was Job's attitude. First, he claimed that God is under no obligation to react to people's actions be they good or bad. He is free to respond or not respond as He chooses. God is above the human sphere of life and only reacts to people when He chooses to do so. This is a thought Eliphaz had expressed earlier (22:2-3, 12). However, Elihu went further by pointing out that people's actions do affect other people (vv. 4-8). Therefore, there is an advantage to being holy.

"Here [in v. 8] we find in a nutshell the point of the whole speech from v 2 onwards. For Elihu, the purpose of right living is not to secure rewards for oneself, not to influence the deity, but to help other human beings. That is where profit or benefit in righteousness lies. Job's concentration upon his own benefit (v 3) is therefore wrongheaded, and not in accord with justice (v 2)."¹

"There is no place in Elihu's theology for doing God's will out of love for him. Man affects only his fellow man by being good or bad (v. 9). And though God may punish or reward man as Judge, there is no place for him in the role of a Father who can be hurt or pleased by man."²

Second, Elihu spoke to the fact that God does not always provide relief when the oppressed pray to Him (vv. 9-16; cf. 24:12; 36:13). He said often these prayers for help spring from a selfish, proud motive rather than from a sincere desire to learn the reason for one's sufferings. Since God may not answer selfish prayers, it is understandable that He was silent in response to Job's arrogant, impatient petitions. Elihu counseled Job to wait for God to answer rather than becoming impatient.

"Job would get his just deserts in due time."³

"It is always possible to think of a reason for unanswered prayer. The trite explanation, which we hear all too often, is that 'You didn't have enough faith', or 'You prayed from the wrong motive', or 'You must have some hidden, unconfessed

¹Clines, *Job 21—37*, pp. 797-98.

²Smick, "Job," p. 1016.

³Habel, p. 189.

sin'. This diagnosis is always applicable. Everyone who prays is aware of the weakness of his faith; everyone with a scrap of self-knowledge knows that his motives are always mixed; everyone who searches his conscience can find no end of fresh sins to be dealt with. If no prayers could be offered and none answered, until all these conditions were satisfied, none would ever be offered and none answered. The Elihus of this world do not care about the cruelty of their perfectionist advice and its unreality. Their theory is saved; that is what matters."¹

"The chief thought of the speech we have also heard already from the three friends [cf. 22:2-3] and Job himself [cf. 27:9-10]. ... Elihu, however, deprives these thoughts of their hitherto erroneous application. ... Job is silent also after this speech. It does not contain the right consolation; it contains, however, censure which he ought humbly to receive."²

5. Elihu's fourth speech chs. 36—37S

Of all Elihu's discourses, this one is the most impressive, because of his lofty descriptions of God.

"This concluding statement contains Elihu's best and most distinctive ideas. Up until now he has been treading on familiar and conventional ground, repeating largely the ideas which Job and his friends have already expressed. The harsh tone that Elihu had adopted in his second and third speeches is here softened. Job 36:1-21 is a more mature and engaging statement of orthodox theology than anything found elsewhere in the book."³

"Unlike all Elihu's previous speeches, this one contains no quotation of Job's words (contrast 33:8-11; 34:5-6; 35:2-3), no doubt an indication that Elihu is now attempting a summary

¹Andersen, p. 257.

²Delitzsch, 2:276.

³Andersen, p. 258.

statement of his own position rather than a refutation of Job."¹

God's dealings with man 36:1-25

The first four verses of chapter 36 introduce this speech. In them, Elihu again urged Job to pay attention to what he would say. He claimed that his words were true and that he himself was "perfect in knowledge" (v. 4).

"In his defence [*sic*] of the righteousness of God, Elihu now develops his thought on the disciplinary meaning of suffering. God is great, but he does not despise men. The incorrigibly wicked he does not preserve, but in mercy he afflicts the righteous that they may be cleansed of all sin and pride."²

Four times in this chapter, and twice in this section (vv. 1-25), Elihu said, "Behold" (vv. 5, 22, 26, 30). In each case he then proceeded to say something important about God. After this, he applied that truth.

Elihu's first affirmation was that God is mighty and merciful (vv. 5-10), and He uses suffering to instruct people. This is Elihu's fundamental thought in all of his speeches. There are two possible responses to God's teaching, he said: hearing (v. 11) and not hearing (v. 12)—and each has consequences. Elihu developed these responses and consequences further, first the response of the godless (vv. 13-14), and then that of the godly (vv. 15-16).

Essentially, the godless typically become angry, and refuse to turn to God for help, and this often leads to a life of shame and an untimely death (vv. 13-14). The righteous who suffer, on the other hand, more often turn to God, submit to His instruction, learn from it, and live (v. 15).

Then Elihu applied these points to Job, and warned him against responding to his sufferings like the ungodly (vv. 16-21). Specifically, Job should avoid anger and scoffing and not let the large price he was paying for his God-sent education (i.e., humble submission to divine chastisement, the "ransom," v. 18) divert him from godly living.

¹Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 854.

²Rowley, p. 227.

Elihu's next major declaration about God, introduced by the second "Behold" (v. 22), was that He is a sovereign and supremely wise teacher (vv. 22-23). Elihu's application to Job was that he should worship God rather than murmuring, complaining, and pitying himself (vv. 24-25). Worship would enable him to learn the lessons that God was teaching him. The introverted (chiastic) structure of verses 22-26 emphasize the fact that God is worthy of praise.

"Elihu has, in fact, steered the argument away from the justice of God to His wisdom, using His power as the bridge."¹

God's dealings with nature 36:26—37:24

Elihu's third "Behold" (36:26) draws attention to the infinite wisdom of God. No one can understand how or why He deals with nature as He does (36:29).

"It is unlikely ... that the theme of Part 2 [36:26—37:24] is simply the power of God, for that is a subject deeply irrelevant to God's justice, which has been the overriding theme of all Elihu's interposition. There are enough hints that the power of God in creation and nature is for Elihu not a subject of praise in its own right, but somehow connected with the matter of God's justice. God's creatorial energies and world governance are not displays of power, they are the vehicle of his righteous judgments."²

Elihu focused next on God's activities in nature. There may be references to autumn conditions in 36:27-33, winter in 37:1-13, and summer in 37:17-18.³ Perhaps the Hebrews thought of three seasons rather than four.⁴

The fourth "Behold" (36:30) affirms a similar point. God uses rain to bring both blessings and curses on people. Lightning and thunder declare God's presence, even if people cannot fully understand when or why they come as they do.

¹Andersen, p. 262.

²Clines, *Job 21—37*, pp. 853-54.

³Zuck, *Job*, p. 158.

⁴Clines, *Job 21—37*, p. 868.

Having introduced the idea of God's sovereign control over all things as reflected in His control of nature (36:26-33), Elihu elaborated on these thoughts in chapter 37. In verses 1-13 he cited more examples of God's working in nature that we cannot comprehend fully (37:5).

"... in the Hebrew Bible 'miracles' ["great things," v. 5] are not, as they often are in current discourse, violations of natural law, but precisely the outworkings of what we call nature ..."¹

We can learn that God does these "great things" for different purposes. (37:7). Sometimes God does them for people's benefit or harm, but sometimes He does them simply for the sake of His world (37:13).

At this point, Elihu turned again to apply these truths to Job's situation (37:14-24). He urged Job to be humble before such a great God (37:14-20). Instead of dictating to God, Job should learn a lesson about the mystery of suffering from His wondrous acts in nature. No one can find God, but we can count on Him to be just (37:21-23). Job also needed to fear God (37:24).

"... fear is a normal human emotion and there is nothing wrong with it. We use the fear of sickness, injury, or death to teach children to wash their hands, stay away from power lines, and look carefully before crossing the street. Fear of financial loss motivates people to buy insurance, and fear of death encourages them to have an annual physical checkup. Fear of death (and the judgment that follows) is a legitimate motive for trusting Jesus Christ and being saved."²

Verse 21 may mean that a person cannot look directly at the sun when the sky is clear. The implication is that neither can we see God in all His glory; He is partially unknowable.

Verse 22 seems to be another allusion to Ugaritic mythology. The Canaanites thought their gods lived in the north, but Elihu said the true God comes out of the north in golden majesty (lit. gold), perhaps like the sun. Since the sun does not rise in the north, this cannot be a description of

¹Ibid., p. 875.

²Wiersbe, p. 37. Paragraph division omitted,

sunrise as symbolic of God's appearing. Rather, it may contrast the appearing of the true God with Baal's supposed appearing.¹

"... when God's doings are mysterious to us, we have to wait, without murmuring, for His solution of the mystery."²

"In this last speech also Elihu's chief aim (ch. xxxvi. 2-4) is to defend God against Job's charge of injustice. He shows how omnipotence, love, and justice are all found in God."³

In his four speeches, Elihu introduced a different reason for suffering: God has things to teach people that they can only learn through discomfort. He also described God in terms that suggest he may have had a more realistic, fuller conception of God than Job's three friends did. All the same, neither Elihu nor the other three men had adequate insight into Job's situation. They could not have had it unless God revealed to them what had transpired in His heavenly court (chs. 1—2).

"For these four theologians, the retribution principle stands unshaken by Job's experience. Eliphaz has allowed a redefinition of 'innocent' to mean 'well, hardly ever wicked.' Bildad has stressed that the law of retribution has a certain sensitivity (if you are not extremely wicked, you don't actually die), while Zophar had declared that the principle of retribution is not at all a rigorous quid pro quo [a favor or advantage granted or expected in return for something], for a percentage of the punishment that should light upon you has already been deducted for mercy's sake. Even Elihu, while recognizing that there are more important theological truths than strict retribution, still affirms its validity."⁴

Elihu's words are closer to the truth and set the stage for God's fuller special revelation of Himself that follows in chapters 38—42. Generally, Elihu emphasized the positive aspects of God's character whereas the other three "comforters" emphasized the negative aspects. Elihu saw God more as a teacher, whereas the other men spoke of Him as a judge.

¹Cf. Pope, pp. 286-87.

²Delitzsch, 2:305.

³Ibid., 2:306.

⁴Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xlii.

"Worshippers of the ancient Near Eastern gods, Satan, Job, and his three antagonists—all these believed that suffering originated from a 'tit for tat,' 'measure for measure,' compensation theology, which governs the correspondence between righteous behavior and prosperity, and sinful behavior and misery. However, Elihu showed that neither he nor God supported this theory. Under God's justice, suffering comes to people for several reasons, many of which are unrelated to compensation theology."¹

One form of compensation theology that is popular in our day is the teaching that a godly Christian will never experience real suffering and hardship. This teaching is popularly referred to as "the prosperity gospel."

"Elihu then brought to Job a totally different perspective: his suffering was not because of past sin, but was (1) to keep Job from continuing to accept a sinful premise for suffering, (2) to draw him closer to God, (3) to teach him a true wisdom that reveals God as sovereignly in control of the affairs of life, and (4) to show that God does reward the righteous, but only on the basis of his love and grace."²

G. THE CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND GOD 38:1—42:6

Finally, God spoke to Job and gave revelation that Job had been demanding for so long (cf. 13:22; 31:35). There was now no need for the middleman that Job had requested who could mediate between them (cf. 9:33; 16:19). Yahweh spoke directly to Job, and Job had the opportunity to respond directly to God.

"God challenged both Satan and Job by confronting them with his wondrous works. And since Job himself is the divine work by which Satan was challenged, it is through the success of

¹Larry J. Waters, "Elihu's Theology and His View of Suffering," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):158. Cf. idem, "Elihu's Categories of Suffering from Job 32—37," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:644 (October-December 2009):405-20.

²Waters, "Suffering in ...," p. 117. See also Hartley, pp. 485-86, for a summary of Elihu's contribution.

this challenge to Job that God perfects the triumph of his challenge to Satan."¹

What God did not say to Job is as surprising as what He did say. He did not mention Job's suffering, He gave no explanation of the problem of evil, He did not defend Himself against Job's charge of injustice, and He made no comment on the retributive principle. God simply revealed Himself to Job and his companions to a greater degree than they had known, and that greater revelation silenced them. He proved Himself to be the truly wise Person.

"The reader is told why Job was suffering in the Prologue, but that is to show that Job was innocent. Job was never told this; had he been told, the book would immediately lose its message to all other sufferers. So the book is teaching us through the divine theophany that there is something more fundamental than an intellectual solution to the mystery of innocent suffering. Though the message reaches Job through his intellect, it is for his spirit."²

"To Elihu the suffering may bring enrichment; to the author of the book of Job it is the presence of God that is enriching, and that presence is given to men of integrity and piety in prosperity and in adversity alike."³

"... whereas the advice of Elihu is to learn his lessons that his prosperity may be restored, the effect of the Divine speeches is to make Job realize that he may have the Divine fellowship in his sufferings, and not merely when he has been delivered from them."⁴

God's role in His speeches was not that of a defendant on trial, whom Job, the prosecutor, charged with injustice. Rather, He was the Prosecutor asking the questions of Job, the defendant. Wiersbe found 77 unanswerable questions that God asked Job in chapters 38—41, which proved Job both ignorant and impotent.⁵ Since Job could not understand

¹Kline, p. 486.

²Smick, "Job," p. 1029.

³Rowley, pp. 20-21.

⁴Ibid., p. 229.

⁵Wiersbe, pp. 23 and 76.

or determine God's ways with nature, he obviously could not comprehend or control God's dealings with people. Who is the truly wise person? It is not Job, or his three older friends, or his younger friend, Elihu, but God. He alone is truly wise.

"In the end the point is that Job cannot have the knowledge to make the assessments he made. It is wiser to bow in submission and adoration of God than to try to judge him."¹

"It is in the God speeches that the use of analogy and allusion reaches its highest point."²

1. God's first speech 38:1—40:2

God's first speech "transcends all other descriptions of the wonders of creation or the greatness of the Creator, which are to be found either in the Bible or elsewhere."³

God's introductory challenge to Job 38:1-3

God sometimes made His self-revelations to people in a storm, symbolic of the disturbing effects His awesome presence produced (cf. Exod. 19:16-17; 1 Kings 19:11-13; 2 Kings 2:1, 11; Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 1:4; Zech. 9:14). One wonders if Job's friends thought God was about to strike Job dead with a bolt of lightning.

"Job's troubles began when a great wind killed his children (1:19). The Lord was in that storm, and now He speaks from the tempest (cf. Ezk. 1:4)."⁴

God began His speech with a challenge to His opponent's understanding, as the five human debaters on earth had done. He accused Job of clouding the truth about Him by saying things that were not true. Job should have defended God's justice rather than denying it, since he claimed to be God's friend. His lack of adequate revelation led to this error. Likewise, every believer should be slow to affirm that he knows God's will about the affairs of an individual's life, his own or someone else's. We still do not know all

¹ *The NET2 Bible* note on 38:1.

² Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 207.

³ Samuel R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 427.

⁴ Andersen, p. 273.

the facts concerning why God allows what takes place. God then told Job to prepare for a difficult job: to explain His ways in nature. If God had done wrong, Job must have known what was right!

"It is not so much that Job is wrong as that he lacks adequate or appropriate understanding of the broader picture."¹

"The Scriptures are as wise in their *reservations* as they are in their *revelations*. Enough is revealed to make faith intelligent. Enough is reserved to give faith scope for development."²

God's questions of Job 38:4—39:30

As Job's friends had done, God began to break Job down blow by verbal blow. Finally all his pride was gone. However, where Job's friends had failed, God succeeded.

"The function of the questions needs to be properly understood. As a rhetorical device, a question can be another way of making a pronouncement, much favoured by orators. For Job, the questions in the Lord's speeches are not such roundabout statements of fact; they are invitations, suggestions about discoveries he will make as he tries to find his own answers. They are not catechetical, as if Job's knowledge is being tested. They are educative, in the true and original meaning of that term. Job is led out into the world. The questions are rhetorical only in the sense that none of them has any answer ventured by Job. But this is not because the questions have no answers. Their initial effect of driving home to Job his ignorance is not intended to humiliate him. On the contrary the highest nobility of every person is to be thus enrolled by God Himself in His school of Wisdom. And the schoolroom is the world! For Job the exciting discoveries to which God leads him bring a giant advance in knowledge, knowledge of himself and of God, for the two always go together in the Bible."³

¹David J. A. Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1096.

²Baxter, 3:27.

³Andersen, p. 269.

God gave Job an oral science examination covering aspects of cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, astronomy, and zoology. He began with the origin of the earth (38:4-7).¹

"This is the verse [v. 4: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth"] that I have always wanted to put in the front of every book on geology, but they won't let me do it."²

God's point was that since Job was absent when He had created the earth, he lacked the information that God had which enabled Him to govern the earth better than Job could.

"It [the question "Where were you ...," v. 4] is not a question about the justice of Job's claim against God, but a denial of Job's competence to raise any question about the way the world is ordered."³

The phrase "sons of God" (v. 7) may refer to the angels (cf. 1:6; Ps. 148:2-3), but it could refer to the stars here (cf. 3:9). Likewise the "morning stars" may be stars or planets, specifically Venus and Mercury, or they could be angels. Clines favored literal stars (or planets).⁴

God next asked Job about the origin of the oceans (38:8-11). Obviously Job had nothing to do with this major aspect of God's creative activity, so his knowledge again proved inferior.

Job had no experience causing the sun to rise and thereby sustaining the earth, either (38:12-15).

"Job has never organized the appearance of a new day; how can he speak then about the governance of the universe?"⁵

The rising sun shakes the wicked out of the ends of the earth (38:13) in the sense that the wicked love darkness rather than light (cf. John 3:19). The "light" of the wicked (38:15), that element in which they flourish, is

¹See Hans-Jurgen Hermission, "Observation on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 52-54.

²McGee, 2:652.

³Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1098.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1101.

⁵Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xlv.

darkness. By causing the sun to rise God withholds the darkness, their "light," and so frustrates (breaks) their work. Another interpretation holds that this verse may be an ironic statement saying that God does not break the wicked but only controls them.¹

Even though "the dawn of every day provides an occasion to punish the wicked ... this possibility is not in practice realized and is therefore not in the plan of the world."²

"Although a major thrust of the Lord's speeches (38:1—40:2; 40:6—41:34) was to polemicize against all potential rivals to His lordship over the cosmos, there is also a subtle refutation of the dogma of divine retribution. Although granting that the control of chaotic forces of evil (which in some instances is inherent in the design of the universe—38:12-15) is somewhat consistent with the principle of divine retribution, God demonstrates that the universe is not always geared to this principle."³

Job was likewise ignorant of the underworld, the springs of the sea, the gates of death, and the scope of the earth (38:16-18)—none of which he had seen. Nor did he know where the "light" (sun) went when it apparently set, or where the "darkness" came from at sunset, and went at sunrise (38:19-20). Verse 21 presents Yahweh as a master of sarcasm.

"We move now in these strophes (the second set of five strophes in the first divine speech) from fundamental cosmic structures to aspects of the world order that impinge on the daily life of its inhabitants ..."⁴

The next subject on God's quiz was the weather (38:22-38). Verses 22 through 24 describe the heavenly storehouses. "Light" here (38:24) may refer to "lightning" or to light in general.

The seventh strophe (vv. 25-27) describes rainstorms and lightning. The "channel for the flood" appears to be the "way" through the sky that rain

¹E.g., Hartley, p. 497.

²Matitiah Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966):99.

³Parsons, p. 145.

⁴Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1108.

takes on its way to the earth (38:25). The eighth strophe (vv. 28-30) deals with more placid provisions of moisture.

Yahweh referred to the constellations next, to further impress Job's lack of insight and his impotence on the patriarch (38:31-33; cf. 9:9). The clouds are the subject of the tenth strophe (vv. 34-38).

Next, God turned to the animal world and pointed out six mammals and four birds—only one of which was evidently a domesticated creature in Job's day: the horse (38:39—39:30). They include: "the ferocious, the helpless, the shy, the strong, the bizarre, the wild."¹ They illustrate God's creative genius and His providential care. The animal world exists for partially unknown reasons, not merely to meet the needs of humankind. People cannot explain why animals live as they do. This is another mystery that only God understands fully.

Animals	Questions	References
Lion and raven	How do they get food?	38:39-41
Goat and deer	How do they bear young?	39:1-4
Donkey and ox	How are they tamed?	39:5-12
Ostrich and horse	Why do they act strangely?	39:13-25
Hawk and vulture	How do they fly?	39:26-30

One writer wrote the following about the wild ox (or aurochs, 39:9-12).

"Extinct since 1627, this enormous animal was the most powerful of all hoofed beasts, exceeded in size only by the hippopotamus and elephant."²

God's point in asking Job to consider each of these animals was this: Even upon careful examination, there are many things about their individual characteristics, behavior, purpose, and life that people simply cannot explain. That is still true today. For reasons unknown to Job, God allowed

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 170.

²Andersen, p. 281. See Zuck, *Job*, pp. 171-74, and George Cansdale, *Animals of Bible Lands*, for more information about these animals.

each animal to experience what was His will for that species. Similarly, He permits every human being to experience what he or she undergoes for reasons partially unknown to us. Only Yahweh is powerful enough and wise enough to do this.

"A main function of the Lord's speeches is to show the absurdity of Job's attempt to manipulate God by a 'lawsuit,' which assumed that his relationship to God is a juridical one."¹

God rarely used legal metaphors in His speeches to Job, which Job had so often utilized. From now on, Job stopped using them. This is an important observation because it shows that the basis of Job and God's relationship was not a legal one, as Job had assumed. A legal relationship requires just compensation by both parties for what each of them has done to the other. The basis of God's dealings with Job was gracious, not legal (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7).

God's concluding challenge to Job 40:1-2

God's first speech began and ended with a challenge to Job (38:2; 40:2). Job had found fault with God for allowing him to suffer even though he was godly. He had said he wished he could meet God in court to face Him with His injustice and to hear His response (13:3, 15). Now God asked Job if he still wanted to contend with Him, after God had reminded him of His power and wisdom.

There is some question about what God was challenging Job to "answer" (40:2b). It may be the question in 40:2a, or it could be all the evidence that God had presented in chapters 38—39.² I prefer the second option.

"Yahweh ironically challenged Job to teach (or correct) Him in the matters of the universe to prove that he was equal to God and thus capable of arguing with God in court."³

"The question means, will Job persist in this contending with God? He who sets God right, as though he knew everything better than He, shall answer the questions put before him."⁴

¹Parsons, pp. 149-50.

²See Reichert, p. 209.

³Parsons, p. 150.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:349.

"Since Job is not knowledgeable enough to discover why things take place on earth as they do, he is left with a decision—either to trust Yahweh, believing that he wisely rules his created world, or to pursue his complaint that exalts himself above Yahweh. Yahweh leaves the initiative with Job either to believe him or to continue to accuse him."¹

2. Job's first reply to God 40:3-5

Earlier in the book Job had hesitated to confront God (9:14). Gradually he became more confident and demanded an audience with God (13:22a). Still later, he spoke almost as God's equal, boasting that he would approach God as a prince (31:37). Now, having discovered his own insignificance (40:4), he had nothing more to say to God (40:5). God had humbled him. Job felt no need to speak more, since he had repeated himself earlier (cf. 33:14). However, Job did not confess any sin. Therefore, God proceeded to speak again.

"Job's first response seems at first timid and insipid, as well as surprisingly brief; it is a far cry from the passion and the scope of his previous speech in chaps. 29—31. Yet the position he adopts is quite subtle, and not at all without bravery. He admits to feeling humiliated by Yahweh, and yet he does not concede that he is in the wrong. If anything, he wants what he has said, over and over again (which is what 'once ... twice' [v 5] means), to stand on the record. He is adding nothing to what he has said, but he is withdrawing nothing."²

3. God's second speech 40:6—41:34

This second divine discourse is similar to, yet different from, the first. It begins as the first one did with a challenge to Job (40:6-14; cf. 38:1-3), but it does not end with one (cf. 40:1-2). In the first speech Yahweh spoke of His inanimate creation and of His animate creation, specifically, 10 animals. In the second speech He concentrated on only two creatures: Behemoth ("great beasts") and Leviathan ("sea monster").

¹Hartley, p. 517.

²Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1140.

"The second speech is not a mere afterthought about two creatures left out of the first speech. Here God accomplishes more than in the first speech, where He merely humbled Job by showing him how He is Creator and Sustainer of the natural world. Now He will convince Job He is also Lord of the moral order, one whose justice Job cannot discredit. And appropriately Job's response this time is repentance (42:1-6)."¹

"In spite of its aggressive tone, this speech is not really a contradiction of anything that Job has said. In many respects it is very close to his own thought, and endorses his sustained contention that justice must be left to God. But it brings Job to the end of his quest by convincing him that he may and must hand the whole matter over completely to God more trustingly, less fretfully. And do it without insisting that God should first answer all his questions and give him a formal acquittal.

"Here, if we have rightly found the heart of the theology of the whole book, is a very great depth. There is a rebuke in it for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses."²

God addressed Job, not in a way to crush and destroy him, but to instruct and convince him: in loving condescension. God did not regard Job as an evil-doer ripe for judgment. Nevertheless, Job's arrogance had to be destroyed. Job still needed to repent for sinfully censuring and blaming God. So God proceeded to show His servant that his affliction was not an evidence of God's hostility toward him.

"The fundamental tone of the divine speech is the thought, that the divine working in nature is infinitely exalted above human knowledge and power, and that consequently man must renounce all claim to better knowledge and right of contention in the presence of the divine dispensations. But at the same time, within the range of this general thought, it is also in

¹Smick, "Architectonics, Structural ...," p. 99.

²Andersen, p. 287.

particular shown how nature reflects the goodness of God as well as His wisdom ..."1

God's challenge 40:6-14

God introduced this second challenge like He did His first, out of the whirlwind, and with a demand that Job refute Him if he could (cf. 38:1-3).

"Yahweh confronts Job with the major flaw in his accusations. In defending his own innocence so emphatically and lashing out so vehemently at God because of his suffering, Job has essentially charged God with acting unjustly. For a mortal to presume himself guiltless and to *impugn* God's just governance of the world approaches the sin of presumptuous pride.

"It is important to observe that Yahweh does not accuse Job of any specific sin, thereby agreeing that Job has lived a righteous life. Nevertheless, if the relationship between himself and his servant is to be restored, Job's self-righteous attitude must be altered and his complaint against God's just governance of the world must be corrected."2

Job had claimed that God was unjust. In answering this challenge, God did not argue with Job. He simply asked Job questions that made it obvious to Job that he was unable to do what he had blamed God for not doing. In criticizing God, Job had placed himself in a position over God. Therefore God now reminded Job that he was not superior or even equal to God (vv. 9, 11-13). If he were superior or equal, Job could deliver himself from his own misery, which he could not do (v. 14). Because Job was inferior to God, he had no right to criticize God for behaving as He did (cf. Rom. 9:20).

It may be that God used the Hebrew word translated "tighten the belt on your waist" in a forensic sense in 38:3 and 40:7: to heighten the irony of His interrogation.³

"This second time also Jehovah speaks to Job out of the storm; not, however, in wrath, but in the profound condescension of His majesty, in order to deliver His servant

¹Delitzsch, 2:351-52.

²Hartley, p. 519.

³Parsons, p. 149.

from dark imaginings, and to bring him to free and joyous knowledge. He does not demand blind subjection, but free submission; He does not extort an acknowledgment of His greatness, but it is effected by persuasion. It becomes manifest that God is much more forbearing and compassionate than men. ... He does not cast Job to the ground by His authoritative utterances, but deals with him as a child; He examines him from the catechism of nature, and allows him to say for himself that he fails in this examination."¹

Notice how graciously God deals with Job in this speech.

God's questions 40:15—41:34

Yahweh's purpose in directing Job's attention to such inexplicable animals on land (Behemoth) and in the water (Leviathan) seems to have been almost the same as His purpose in His first speech: He intended to humble Job by reminding him of his very limited power and wisdom, compared with God's, so Job would submit to His Lordship.

Scholars disagree on the question of whether the Behemoth and Leviathan that the writer described here were real or mythical creatures. Some of the descriptions, if taken literally, could hardly refer to real animals that are alive today (e.g., 41:18-22).² Nevertheless, this is poetic literature and these descriptions may be figurative, specifically: hyperbole (overstatement to emphasize one or more characteristics, similar to a caricature).

"Our poet can hardly write a line without including a simile, a habit which many critics censure as artistic over-kill."³

Those who prefer the mythical monster interpretation do so mainly because Leviathan almost certainly describes a mythical creature in 3:8, Psalms 74:14, and Isaiah 27:1, and perhaps elsewhere in Scripture. Also, the description of Leviathan in 41:18-22 seems to picture an unreal sea

¹Delitzsch, 2:354-55.

²See René López, "The Meaning of 'Behemoth' and 'Leviathan' in Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173:692 (October-December 2016):401-24.

³Andersen, p. 291.

monster. Furthermore, there are similar descriptions of this sea monster in ancient Near Eastern myths.

Nevertheless, it seems to many of the commentators, and to me, that Leviathan here, but not everywhere in Scripture, describes a real animal—for the following reasons: The details of the description seem to picture a real animal. Moreover, both Behemoth and Leviathan occur elsewhere in Scripture apart from mythical connotations (e.g., Joel 1:20 where the Hebrew word translated "Behemoth" in Job 40:15 reads "animals"). Additionally, Scripture states that God created Behemoth (Job 40:15) and Leviathan (Ps. 104:26).

Yahweh reminded Job that Behemoth was a creature, as he was (40:15). Job was not the Creator; he was on a lower level. The Hebrew word translated "Behemoth" is the plural of the word usually rendered "animal" or "beast." Consequently, some believe that verse 15a is an introductory statement for what God says about both animals that follows. However, in verses 15b-24, it is clear that God had one particular animal in view. Since He gave a name to the second animal (Leviathan, 41:1), He probably intended that we understand "Behemoth" as a name for the first animal.

Bible students have identified several animals as Behemoth because of its description in 40:15-24. Some of these are the elephant,¹ the extinct rhinoceros that had no horn,² the extinct brontosaurus dinosaur,³ the sauropod dinosaur,⁴ the buffalo (bison),⁵ the water buffalo,⁶ and, most popularly, the hippopotamus.⁷ Perhaps both Behemoth and Leviathan refer to dinosaur species, or perhaps to other ancient animals that have now become extinct.

¹R. Laird Harris, "The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God," *Grace Journal* 13 (Fall 1976):20-21.

²Bernard Northrup, "Light on the Ice Age," *Bible-Science Newsletter*, June 1976, p. 4.

³"Dinosaurs and the Bible," *Five Minutes with the Bible and Science* (supplement to *Bible-Science Newsletter*, May 1976), p. 2.

⁴Paul J. N. Lawrence, Brian D. Thomas, and Stephen Taylor, "Look at the Behemoth, Which I Made Along with You," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 178:712 (October-December 2021):398-414.

⁵Thomson, 1:384-86.

⁶B. Coureyer, "Qui est Behemoth?" *Revue Biblique* 82 (1975):418-43.

⁷E.g., Delitzsch, 2:357-64; Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 119; Clines, *Job 38—42*, pp. 1183-90; Gaebelein, 2:1:194; et al.

Verse 19a probably means Behemoth is the first in size and strength, perhaps among animals of its kind, or among animals in Job's area.

"The adult hippopotamus weighs up to eight thousand pounds."¹

Verse 19b may mean that only its Maker should dare go near it for hand-to-hand combat, because no human being would defeat it.² The definite article "the" before "Jordan" in verse 23b is absent in the Hebrew text. The name Jordan means "the descender," so God probably had any swift river in mind in this verse.³ "When he is on watch" (v. 24a) is literally "in his eyes," the only parts of a submerged hippopotamus, along with its nose (v. 24b), that are visible above the water.

"The wonder is that God has taken the trouble to create such a useless creature."⁴

Various writers have identified Leviathan in 41:1 as a mythical sea monster,⁵ a marine dinosaur,⁶ a whale,⁷ a dolphin, even a "tunny" (tuna?) fish, and most commonly a crocodile.⁸

This section (ch. 41) contains the longest and last description of an animal in the book. As such it is climactic. God first drew Job's attention to the fact that Leviathan was very hard for people to capture and use (vv. 1-11). Since Job could not challenge Leviathan successfully, he should hardly expect to challenge its Creator successfully (v. 10). Job should not think that because he had a little wisdom and strength he could get the best of God in a contest. He could not even overcome Leviathan, one of God's creatures. "Give to" (v. 11a) is literally "anticipate."

"The argument to the superior strength of God is made, not to discourage men from trying to have dealings with God, but

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 179.

²Reichert, p. 212.

³Rowley, p. 257.

⁴Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1184.

⁵Pope, pp. 329-31.

⁶"Dinosaurs and ..."

⁷Henry, p. 573.

⁸E.g., Delitzsch, 2:364-80; Gordis, *The Book ...*, p. 119; Clines, *Job 38—42*, pp. 1190-1200; Gaebelien, 2:195; et al.

to enhance God's capability of managing the affairs of the universe so that men will trust Him."¹

Verses 12-25 emphasize Leviathan's anatomy. "His sneezes flash forth light" (v. 18a) may mean that, in the proper light, the spray from his nostrils looks like jets of light.² Its eyes may be like "the eye of dawn" (v. 18b) in that they were the first part of the animal to become visible as it rose to the water's surface.³ Verses 19-21 may describe its release of "pent-up breath together with water in a hot stream from its mouth [that] looks like a stream of fire in the sunshine."⁴

The last section of this description (vv. 26-34) emphasizes man's inability to capture Leviathan. Verse 31b may allude to the foam that formed on the top of a pot when someone was preparing ointment.⁵ The deep appeared grey-headed (v. 32b), perhaps when the animal's wake made whitecaps on the dark water. The section concludes by stressing this beast's fearless confidence. If people cannot shake the confidence of one of God's creatures, how foolish it was for Job to think he could intimidate God.

"These two descriptions are, we think, designed to teach Job how little capable of passing sentence upon the evil-doer he is ..."⁶

To some degree Job, his three friends, and Elihu had all based their arguments on the rationality of God's acts. God reminded them of Behemoth and Leviathan partially to teach them all that His actions transcend human ability to explain everything rationally.

"Animals independent of man (38:39—39:30) and animals dangerous and repulsive to man (40:15—41:34) were all a grand zoological exhibition to help Job sense that because he had nothing to do with making, sustaining, or even subduing

¹Andersen, p. 290.

²Reichert, p. 216.

³Ibid.

⁴Rowley, p. 262.

⁵Zuck, *Job*, p. 183.

⁶Delitzsch, 2:384.

them, it was unthinkable that he could question their Creator."¹

Another writer advocated a different view with which I do not agree.

"... the beasts themselves celebrate instead Job's triumph."²

One might conclude after reading these speeches of Yahweh that God is not very compassionate. He may seem more concerned about establishing His own glory than about Job's suffering. However, we need to remember that God could have said nothing. Furthermore, by directing Job's thinking as He did, God did what was best for Job—the truly loving thing. He did not just give him answers to specific questions but a vision of Himself that would transform Job's life forever after.

God's words to Job may sound harsh, but He was simply responding to Job in the same vein as Job had been addressing Him (cf. 2 Sam. 22:26-27; Ps. 18:25-26). He did not do this to mock him but to make a forceful impression on him. The forcefulness of His words harmonizes with the forcefulness of His revelation and the forcefulness of His person.³ God wants people to understand Him as best we can within our finite human limitations. That is evidently why He spoke to Job, and that is why He preserved this record of His revelation in Scripture.⁴

"These, then, are the main significances of the speech from the whirlwind: Job was *not meant* to know the explanation of his sufferings; but God was concerned and *sympathetic*; the Divine purpose was that Job should rest in God Himself, apart from explanations; also that Job should come to the end of his *self-ism* and find his all in God."⁵

"That no summary challenge was needed at the end of the Lord's second speech is indicative that Job's second response

¹Zuck, *Job*, p. 183. Cf. Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xlvi.

²John G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: On the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15-41:26," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, p. 231.

³See Robert Gordis, "The Lord out of the Whirlwind." *Judaism* 13:1 (Winter 1964):48-63.

⁴For seven different explanations of the meaning of Yahweh's speeches to Job, see Donald E. Gowan, "God's Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 8:2 (December 1986):85-102.

⁵Baxter, 3:73.

(42:1-6) was a willing one in contrast to his initial reluctant reply (40:3-5)."¹

4. Job's second reply to God 42:1-6

Job's words reveal the changes that God's revelations had produced in him. He was aware, as never before, that God had all power and all wisdom. This resulted in an attitude of awe and submission (v. 2). He saw that it was foolish for him to question God's actions. God knew what He was doing, even though Job did not.

By quoting God's first question back to Him (v. 3a; 38:2), Job meant: You were exactly right in asking, "Who is this who darkens the divine plan by words without knowledge?" That is just what I have been doing. He admitted having spoken presumptuously (v. 3b-c).

Job also repeated what God had said when He began each of His speeches (v. 4; 38:3; 40:7). God had asked for Job's reply. Now Job gave it. However, it was not the courtroom accusation he had said he wanted to deliver to God. It was instead a confession of his own folly.

"He has not only realized his folly in passing judgment on things that were beyond his understanding. He has found the answer to his problem. For at bottom this was not a problem of theodicy [a vindication of God's justice], but a problem of fellowship. He has not learned the cause of his sufferings or the explanation of the apparent injustices in the world, but he has found God again. For hitherto he, no less than his friends, had believed that his sufferings meant that God had cast him off and that he was isolated from him who had been his friend in days gone by. But now God had come to him and spoken to him, and he knew that he could have fellowship with God even in his sufferings. Therefore Job declares that he has found a new understanding of God, compared with which his former knowledge was but as the knowledge of rumour [*sic*] compared with sight. This is the climax of the book, as we should expect

¹Parsons, p. 141.

to find at the end of the poetic portion, for which the Prologue and Epilogue are but the setting."¹

"To Job the supremely important thing is that God has come to him in his suffering, showing him that he is not isolated from God by his suffering. He has cried for God again and again, and God has come to him, not to enter into debate with him on the issues he has thrashed out with his friends, but to show him that now, when he most needs God, God is with him. ... It is of the essence of its [the book's] message that Job found God *in* his suffering, and so found relief not *from* his misfortunes, but *in* them."²

Job had heard of God from others previously. This limited, secondhand knowledge had led him to some false conclusions. Now, after more revelation, he saw God more clearly. He had greater spiritual insight (v. 5). This greater understanding of God enabled Job to understand himself better. He saw both God and himself more realistically.³

"... the evil of Job's heart consisted in his resting on the fruits of grace in himself, and this would have only increased the good opinion he had already entertained of himself: kind in prosperity, he would have been also patient in adversity. God therefore carries on His work, that Job may know himself."⁴

The Hebrew word translated "retract" (v. 6) means to "despise" or "reject." Job evidently not only withdrew his charges against God but also despised and rejected his attitude of pride. Job had previously expressed remorse over his losses, but now he grieved over his sins. Job's repentance seems to have been more than turning from his sorrowful condition. He changed his mind and abandoned his rebellious pride and arrogance toward God.⁵

"He does not repent of sins that have allegedly brought on the suffering; he repents of his arrogance in impugning God's

¹Rowley, p. 265.

²Ibid., p. 20.

³See William Lillie, "The Religious Significance of the Theophany in the Book of Job," *Expository Times* 68:11 (August 1957):355-58.

⁴Darby, 2:50.

⁵Patrick, p. 369-71.

justice, he repents of the attitude whereby he simply demands an answer; as if such were owed him. He repents of not having known God better ..."1

"From now on he will locate his self-worth in his relationship with Yahweh, not in his own moral behavior or innocence."2

Clines understood Job's words in verses 5 and 6 differently:

"It would seem rather that Job has come to the realization that his case is hopeless: Yahweh is determined not to answer questions about justice. Job will withdraw his suit not because he has lost his case but because, given the attitude of his opponent, he finally despairs totally of ever winning it—and even of having it heard."3

I believe that Job admitted sinning because he suffered, but he did not admit that he was suffering because he had sinned.⁴ Job forgot his cry for vindication since he had received something much better: a revelation of the person of God and renewed fellowship with God. He had lost all, but he had found God and was now content. He had stopped asking, "Why?" since he had come to know God. We do not need to know why if we know God. Or, to put it another way, "Knowing God is better than knowing answers."⁵ This is one of the great lessons of this book.

"Suffering is sometimes a mystery. We must affirm both the mystery and God. ... The God speeches remind us that a Person, not a principle, is Lord."⁶

"God permitted the afflictions to come upon His servant Job, not only to manifest His power, but for Job's good, to draw him into the place of nearness and of blessing."⁷

Temptation to become distressed overtakes us all when bad things happen to us. We want to know why things happen as they do. If we know that God

¹D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, p. 174.

²Hartley, p. 537.

³Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1216.

⁴Zuck, *Job*, p. 185.

⁵Charles R. Swindoll, *The Swindoll Study Bible*, p. 619.

⁶Bullock, pp. 108-9.

⁷Gaebelein, 2:1:198.

is in control, and that in His loving wisdom He has permitted our suffering and controls it, we do not need to know why we are in pain. That is not to say we should stop trying to discover reasons. Our suffering may be due to our sin, as Job's three friends said, or because God wants to teach us something, as Elihu affirmed. However, suffering may not be our lot for these reasons. When we cannot determine why we are suffering, we can still rest in God and continue to trust and obey Him, because we know He is sovereign and loving. This is a very important perspective to help other people who are suffering to see. By sharing it, we can be genuine comforters, not miserable comforters like Job's friends.

"Sometimes the best answers to life's most baffling and troubling questions lie not in what God says but in who He is. When believers recognize that truth, they begin to see that God does not just know the answers but, in fact, is the answer. To know Him is to know all one needs to know. The rest may come later but is unnecessary for now (1 Cor. 2:9; 1 John 2 [sic 3]:2-3)."¹

III. EPILOGUE 42:7-17

The book closes as it opened: with a prose explanation by the inspired human writer. He gave us important information about Job's friends (vv. 7-9) and then Job's fortunes (vv. 10-17).

"... Satan and Job's wife (who are prominent in the prologue as agents of evil who try to get Job to curse God) are intentionally omitted in the epilogue. This deliberate omission emphasizes a major teaching of the book, namely, that man's relationship to God is not a 'give-and-get' bargain nor a business contract of mutual benefit."²

"... the final teaching of the book is not that God's rule demands *faith* before everything else; the final teaching is,

¹Merrill, p. 400.

²Parsons, p. 142.

that sufferings are for the righteous man the way to glory, and that his faith is the way to sight."¹

"See the three main features of the epilogue—transformation [of Job as regards his character], vindication [of Job before his friends], restoration [to Job of his former prosperity, and far more]."²

"What this concluding episode does for these issues is, surprisingly, to reinstate the dogma of retribution as the principle according to which the world operates. For the story shows at its end that the righteous man Job is also the most prosperous, just as he was at the beginning. ... Even if in every instance it does not explain human fates, in the main it is affirmed by the Book of Job as the truth about the moral universe."³

A. JOB'S FRIENDS 42:7-9

God addressed Eliphaz, but he also had Bildad and Zophar in view. He evidently excluded Elihu because he had not misrepresented God as the other three friends had.

"Elihu does not explain God's dilemma, but he does correct the false arguments of Job's friends. This is confirmed by God's rebuke of Job's three friends and His silence toward Elihu."⁴

"Elihu's philosophy of suffering certainly does not cover all the ground; and, of course, so far as Job's sufferings in particular were concerned Elihu was just as ignorant of their real cause (i.e. the slander of Satan and the challenge of Jehovah) as the other speakers in the dialogue. Yet his view of suffering is undoubtedly nearer the truth than anything submitted by Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar; and especially is he bordering on

¹Delitzsch, 2:385.

²Baxter, 3:78.

³Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xlvi. Paragraph division omitted.

⁴Hanna, p. 265.

tremendous truth when at the end of his speech, he advocates that faith in God Himself is better even than an explanation."¹

The error of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar was limiting God's sovereignty. By asserting that God always punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous in this life, they were limiting God and committing a sin that required a sacrifice for atonement (covering). Modern prosperity theology advocates should take note!

"Nevertheless He [God] is willing to be gracious."²

Job evidently forgave his friends as God had forgiven him (cf. Matt. 6:12), and prayed for them as a priest (cf. 1:5; Matt. 5:44). Job stood as a mediator between his friends and God. He had previously felt the need of a mediator himself.

"They had attempted to restore Job to God by philosophy. He is now to be the means of restoring them by prayer."³

Rather than judging Job, God accepted him because he was indeed His servant, not the rebel that his friends accused him of being. The writer used the word "servant" four times in these verses (vv. 7, 8 [three times]). Job had served God, among other ways, by being the vehicle through whom God brought the revelation of this book to its readers. Job not only obtained God's favor himself, but he became the instrument of God's grace to other sinners.

"The three also obey the divine direction; for although they have erred, God's will is above everything in their estimation, and they cheerfully subordinate themselves as friends to the friend."⁴

B. _____ JOB'S FORTUNE 42:10-17

Notice that God began to prosper Job again after he interceded for his friends (v. 10), not just after he repented. His willingness to pray for his enemies showed the genuineness of the transformation that had taken

¹Baxter, 3:64.

²Delitzsch, 2:386.

³Morgan, pp. 219-20.

⁴Delitzsch, 2:387.

place in his heart. He no longer felt antagonistic toward God but accepting of his enemies (cf. Matt. 6:15).

The LORD increased all that Job possessed twofold (v. 10).

Items	Pre-trial	Post-trial	Totals
Sheep	7,000	7,000	14,000
Camels	3,000	3,000	6,000
Pairs of oxen	500	500	1,000
Female donkeys	500	500	1,000
Sons	7	7	14
Daughters	3	3	6
Age in years	70?	140	210?

Female donkeys were more valuable than male donkeys, because the females produced milk and foals. Deceased children, according to the Old Testament, are not absolutely lost (cf. 2 Sam. 12:23). The names of Job's daughters (v. 14) corroborate the statement that they were exceptionally beautiful (v. 15). Jemimah means "dove," Keziah means "perfume," and Keren-happuch means "horn of eye-paint."

"Females are not usually named in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible unless they are going to be important for the plot, so this notation is out of the ordinary. It does not make the daughters prominent, however, but is another sign of the wealth and status of the patriarch Job."¹

The reference to Job giving his daughters an inheritance with their brothers—an unusual practice in the ancient Near East—reflects the extent of Job's wealth and compassion. Under the Mosaic Law, daughters inherited from their fathers only if the daughters had no brothers (Num. 27:8). This is another indication that Job probably did not live under the Mosaic Law.

¹Clines, *Job 38–42*, p. 1237.

Job had complained that he had been unjustly treated by being deprived of his possessions and his good name, but now God graciously restored these things and doubled them.¹

Does the fact that God eventually blessed Job materially in life for his godliness prove Job's three friends were right after all? Is the basis of man's relationship with God really retribution? No, God did not reward Job in life primarily because he was good, but because God is gracious.² The basis of people's relationship with God is grace. The Book of Job does not deny the fact that God blesses the righteous. God's blessing of Job after his trial is one example of this.³ However, it shows that this principle has exceptions if we look at life only this side of the grave. Because God is sovereign He can deal with anyone as He chooses for reasons known only to Him. Nevertheless, He always deals justly (cf. Gen. 18:25; Rom. 9:14).

"The restoration of Job's prosperity was not the reward of his piety, but the indication that the trial was over. Any judge who left a defendant to languish in prison after he had been declared innocent would be condemned as iniquitous, and if Job's trials had continued after he was acquitted it would have been similarly iniquitous."⁴

Job apparently lived 140 years after his affliction (v. 16), suggesting that God blessed him with twice the normal lifespan of "seventy years" (Ps. 90:10) after his trials ended. This assumes that Job was 70 when his trials began (the perfect age?) and that he lived twice as long after his trials ended. The Septuagint preserves a Jewish tradition that Job died at the age of 240, though a variant reading has 248.⁵

"This chapter assures us that, no matter what happens to us, *God always writes the last chapter*. Therefore, we don't have to be afraid. We can trust God to do what is right, no matter how painful our situation might be."⁶

¹Clines, *Job 38—42*, p. 1237.

²Parsons, p. 145; Andersen, p. 294.

³Hanna, p. 270.

⁴Rowley, p. 266.

⁵See Hartley, p. 543; Zuck, *Job*, p. 188.

⁶Wiersbe, p. 82.

"His [Job's] greatest blessing was knowing God better and understanding His working in a deeper way."¹

¹Ibid.

Conclusion

The central subject of the book is the basis of the divine-human relationship. The greatest value of the book is its revelation of the sufficiency of God's grace when all the props that support life crumble. Job learned that even though God did not deliver him from his trials, He was with him in those trials. God's apparent absence from him made him despair, but when God finally revealed Himself, Job rested in God's fellowship.

The writer recorded the process by which God allowed Satan to strip Job of all the supports of life, so that he finally had nothing to lean on but God. We can identify eight things that Job lost, things which most people lean on for support as they go through life. First, Job lost his wealth (1:13-17). Later in the book he mentioned that when he lost his wealth, he also lost the respect of his acquaintances. So he lost both his material prosperity and the respect that comes with it. Second, he lost his children (1:18-19). Third, he lost his health (2:7-9). Fourth, he lost the support of his wife (2:9). The woman who should have comforted and encouraged him in his afflictions as his closest friend turned against him. John Chrysostom, the early church father, wrote that Satan did not destroy Job's wife, along with his children, because he wanted to use her to afflict Job.¹

Fifth, he lost his friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu. These men have come in for a lot of criticism, and much of it is deserved. With friends like them, who needs enemies? But they were true friends, if unwise. They came and visited him in his grief. They sat silent with him for seven days before they said anything. When they finally spoke, they spoke directly to him rather than gossiping about him to other people. However, they misunderstood Job. They continued to accuse him, even when he denied committing the sins they accused him of committing. And they attacked him viciously and repeatedly, rather than comforting and encouraging him.

Sixth, Job lost his own sense of his individual worth as a human being (6:8-9). He had become, by this time, more discouraged than how he felt right after his wealth and children had been taken from him (cf. 1:21a). Seventh, He lost his sense of contact with a gracious God (7:20). He had felt God was gracious earlier (cf. 1:21b). Eighth, and finally, he lost his conviction

¹Cited by Smick, "Job," p. 886.

that God governed justly (9:2). He earlier believed that God was just (cf. 2:10).

In summary, Job lost all the things people lean on for support in life: material possessions, the respect of other people, children, health, a supportive spouse, true friends, self-respect and a sense of personal worth, a sense of God's presence, and confidence in God's justice. All that was left for Job was himself and his belief that God existed. Even though he still believed God existed, he no longer had any sense of God's fellowship with himself. He lost his feeling of relationship with God. He felt completely cut off from God.

I believe the primary application of the Book of Job is that we do not need to know why God does what He does if we know Him. Job is a book that deals with persevering faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7).

"Job's central question is: ... How can I go on believing in God?"¹

"Viewed as an answer to the problem of suffering, then, the argument of the Book of Job is: By all means let Job the patient be your model so long as that is possible for you [cf. 1:21; 2:10]; but when equanimity fails, let the grief and anger of Job the impatient direct itself and yourself toward God, for only in encounter with him will be [*sic*] the tension of suffering be resolved."²

"To sufferers in all ages the book of Job declares that less important than fathoming the intellectual problem of the mystery of suffering is the appropriation of its spiritual enrichment through the fellowship of God."³

"The first value of the book—I name it first emphatically—is that it reveals the breakdown of human wisdom at its highest

¹Henry McKeating, "The Central Issue of the Book of Job," *Expository Times* 82:8 (May 1971):246, See also R. A. F. MacKenzie, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job," *Biblica* 40:2 (1959):435-45.

²Clines, *Job 1—20*, p. xxxix.

³Rowley, p. 21.

level, the breakdown of human philosophy in its attempt to account for the experience of the human soul."¹

In this book, the writer clarified the basis of human relationship with God. It is not retribution. Retribution is the theory that *before death*, God always pays someone in kind according to what that person gives Him: blessing for righteousness or suffering for unrighteousness. We should not return to God what God sends us either: worship for blessing or cursing for pain. Rather, the basis of our relationship is grace. God owes people nothing. Because people are sinful creatures God can justly curse us. However, because God is a loving Father He chooses to bless us in many ways. People's response to God's grace should be trust and obedience.

Why do the godly suffer? Here is what the characters in Job answered:

People	Answer	Evaluation
Job's wife	God is unfair.	Never.
Job's three friends	God is punishing them because of their sin.	Sometimes.
Job	God wants to destroy them because of their sin.	Sometimes.
Elihu	God wants to educate them because of their ignorance.	Sometimes.
God	God wants to develop them and to demonstrate His glory.	Always.

The different characters in the book based their understanding and their convictions on different sources of knowledge.

People	Epistemological base
Job's wife	Empiricism
Job's three friends	Rationalism

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p. 219.

Job	Rationalism
Elihu	Human inspiration
God	Revelation

Job's three friends each had a different basis of authority.

People	Authoritative base
Eliphaz	Experience
Bildad	Tradition
Zophar	Intuition

"Eliphaz rests his view of things on *observation*; Bildad rests on *tradition*; Zophar rests on *assumption*. Eliphaz is the religious moralist. Bildad is the religious *legalist*. Zophar is the religious *dogmatist*. Eliphaz is the *apologist*. Bildad is the *lecturer*. Zophar is the *bigot*; he is full of convictions, but they are assumptions, not reasoned conclusions."¹

"Like Job's friends, we tend to see a very direct cause and effect relationship between our actions and our suffering. Job helps us understand that God's ways are not always evident and that effects on earth may in fact have their cause in heaven."²

Some of the practical lessons the Book of Job teaches include the following: God is in control even when He appears not to be. The good will of God includes suffering. Bad things happen to good people sometimes because God allows Satan to test them so they will grow, not because God seduces them to do evil (cf. James 1:13). God is just in spite of appearances. Whatever God does is right because He does it. We can and should worship God even when we are suffering. We can trust God even when we have no explanation for what is happening to us. It is futile and foolish to criticize

¹Baxter, 3:50.

²Hanna, p. 264.

God or to challenge Him. We create problems for ourselves when we put God in a box. When we feel anxious we should seek to get to know God better by consulting His special revelation: the Bible.¹

"In conclusion, the book of Job teaches that a person may serve God faithfully, whether his circumstances are bleak or filled with promise, for he has the assurance that God is for him, seeking his ultimate good. A person can triumph over suffering through faith in God."²

"The book of Job makes an outstanding contribution to the theology of God and man. God is seen as sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, and caring. By contrast, man is seen as finite, ignorant, and sinful. And yet, even in the face of suffering, man can worship God, confident that His ways are perfect and that pride has no place before Him."³

¹Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):393-413, suggested four hermeneutical and four homiletical guidelines to encourage the teaching and preaching of Job. See also Waters, "Suffering in ...," p. 124, for additional lessons that this book teaches the modern reader.

²Hartley, p. 50.

³Zuck, "A Theology ...," p. 232.

Appendix

Job's Questions and Jesus' Answers

The Book of Job is a book of answers, but even more it is a book of questions, big questions, important questions. Many of the questions raised in this book were answered later in the New Testament. This book is a revelation of basic human experience. It reflects life as all people live it in a context of sin, in an atmosphere of sorrow, and with a response of silence from heaven. That is one reason it is a wisdom book (along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes).

Out of his despair and agony, Job made several statements that reflected his needs and wants, in his completely unsupported and vulnerable condition. These statements are expressions of the most basic needs of humankind that all people feel when the props are knocked out from under their lives. These statements, as well as the desperate experiences in life out of which they were uttered, account in part for this book being the classic revelation that it has been ever since it was first written. Consider eight of Job's profound utterances:

First, in his desperate need, Job longed for an umpire who would stand between himself and God, someone who could mediate between them so they could make contact with each other (9:2-3, 32-33). Jesus is the mediator whom God provided to meet this need (1 Tim. 2:5: "There is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus").

Second, Job wondered whether there was life after death (14:14). He thought there was. Jesus answered this great question in John 11:25-26: "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." Jesus died and then came back to life. He has told us what it is like on the other side.

Third, Job next cried out for a divine advocate, someone in God's presence who could represent his case before God in His heavenly courtroom (16:19-21). Here we have another basic need of humankind. Jesus Christ is the advocate Job longed for. Heb. 9:24 says: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made by hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself,

now to appear in the presence of God for us." And 1 John 2:1 assures us: "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Fourth, Job hoped for a living vindicator, someone who would vindicate him when he would stand before God's judgment bar (19:25-27b). "Redeemer" is *go'e/* in Hebrew, which means "vindicator." Jesus is that vindicator. He lives to vindicate the righteous now (Heb. 7:25: "Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"). And He will return to vindicate the righteous in the future (2 Pet. 3:9-10: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered").

Fifth, Job also wanted to find his judge (23:3-9). Jesus is that judge. He will judge everyone one day. Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17:31: "... He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead."

Sixth, Job challenged God to prove him a sinner (31:35-37). Job called for a standard of righteousness. Jesus provided that standard, and He proved every person guilty before God (Matt. 5:48: "Therefore you shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect").

Seventh, Job learned that he was of small account (40:4-5). Jesus revealed God's great love for us who are of little account (John 3:16). It does not matter that we are of small account, since we have a God who reached down to give us a significant identity in Christ. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

Eighth, and finally, Job came to acknowledge his limited understanding of God (42:1-6). Jesus called for this kind of repentance (Matt. 18:3: "Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"). And Jesus lifts the humble out of dust and ashes and gives them great blessings, the greatest of which, in this life, is fellowship with Himself—even in suffering (Eph. 1:3-14: "Blessed be the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ...").

The Book of Job, then, shows us a soul stripped bare. We hear its challenges, its needs, its questions, in Job's words. But the book does not respond to the challenges, meet the needs, or answer the questions. Only in the New Testament do we find these things. We discover there that it is Jesus Christ who responded to these challenges, met these needs, and answered these questions. He is the great answer to the great questions of life.¹

¹Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *The Answers of Jesus to Job*.

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