The Book of Job

Dating the Book of Job

There is much difference of opinion about when Job was written. Some scholars date it during the patriarchal period while others date it during the postexilic period. There are no helpful hints within the book to indicate when the author wrote it, hence, the differences of opinion. Certain passages in Job seem to be borrowed from the Psalms and the Prophecy of Isaiah. For example Job 7: 17 says, "What is man that Thou dost magnify him, And that Thou art concerned about him." This corresponds with Ps. 8: 4, "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?" Furthermore, the suffering servant portraits in Isaiah 40-55 are similar to the suffering endured by Job (*Job*, John E. Hartley, p. 14). Thus, one is tempted to believe that the author borrowed from the Psalms and Isaiah. On the other hand, this begs the question: What if the psalmist and Isaiah borrowed from Job? We do not know who wrote first. Another possibility is that the author of Job and Psalms borrowed from a third source (Hartley, p. 18). Yet another possibility, one which I prefer, is that none of the authors borrowed from the others, but were led by the Holy Spirit to write similar statements. Why couldn't this be a possibility? But this still does not help us date the book.

In Job 1: 5, Job sacrifices burnt offerings for his children as a preemptive (preventative) measure for the forgiveness of any sins which they may commit. It appears on the surface of things that he is acting on his own and not through the agency of any priest, nor is there any note in the text that Job is a priest himself. This would indicate a patriarchal date for the book when the Levitical priesthood had not yet been established (cf. Gen. 4: 4; 22: 2). On the other hand, Job could have offered the sacrifices through a priest without the author including this information in the text. Thus, we are still left in the dark about the dating of the book. Perhaps God intended to obscure the dating of Job so that believers in every age would identify with his suffering no matter what ***kind*** of suffering they are going through. Job is ***any believer*** who is going through suffering, especially those who don't have a clue about ***why*** they are suffering.

The Structure of Job

Job is written with a very clear structure. The first two chapters form the ***prologue*** of the book and are written in narrative style (conversational style). The last part of Job—chapter 42: 7-17—is also written in narrative and forms the ***epilogue***. The rest of the book is written in poetic style. There are three cycles of speeches, one by each of his friends followed by a speech from Job. (This pattern is altered in the third cycle in which Zophar does not speak). There are also two speeches from Yahweh followed by two responses from Job. Job suffers in three major ways: the loss of his property, the loss of his children, and the loss of his health. One could also say he suffers a fourth loss in the loss of his respect and influence among his friends who are convinced he is suffering from some known sinfulness. A fourth round of speeches occurs when Elihu offers his contribution to the debate (See outline).

Themes in Job

Two major themes appear in Job. One is ***theodicy***, the justification of the way God deals with men, particularly those who fear Him and serve Him. Job disapproved of the way God was

dealing with him, and he wanted God to explain Himself and justify His ill-treatment. We will explore this theme in detail at the end of our study, but another important theme is the doctrine of ***retributive justice.*** This doctrine, as interpreted and applied by Job's three friends as well as many well-meaning Christians, says that the righteous will ***always*** receive God's blessings ***in this life*** and the wicked will ***always*** receive His curses and punishments ***in this life—no exceptions***. The key phrases in this doctrine have been highlighted—"always", "in this life", and "no exceptions". This is where Job's friends' interpretation and application of this doctrine went seriously astray. There is certainly Biblical justification for the belief that God blesses the righteous and punishes the unrighteous. The curses and blessings of the Old Covenant spelled out in Deut. 27-28 clearly promise blessings for obedience to the covenant and curses for disobedience to the covenant. Furthermore, the wisdom literature of Proverbs gives the reader reason to believe that rewards are forthcoming for righteousness, and that trouble is the wages of the wicked: "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you" (Prov. 3: 1-2) compared with Prov. 10:8, "The wise of heart will receive commands, but a babbling fool will be ruined."

The wisdom literature of Ps. 1 effectively summarizes the doctrine of retribution, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." For another example of a wisdom Psalm which teaches the doctrine of retribution, see Ps. 34, particularly vv. 11-22. There seems little question that the Psalms and Proverbs teach a version of ***retributive justice*** that is reflected in the arguments of Job's three friends. The ***law of sowing and reaping*** is a universally recognized principle believed by all people of all religions, and this principle is clearly expressed by Paul in Galatians 6: 7-9, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (cf. Lk. 19: 21; Jn. 4: 38; 1 Cor. 9: 11; 2 Cor. 9: 6).

So what's the problem with Job's three friends and where did they go wrong (cf. Job 42: 7-9)? They went wrong not because they believed in retribution, a Biblical principle, but because they made retribution into a ***theology with no exceptions.*** It is ***always*** true, they believed, that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer even in this present world. Job was suffering, they argued, because he had sinned, and sinned grievously; and as soon as he admitted it and repented he could move on, be forgiven, and once again receive the favor of God. So the doctrine goes. But we can think of many exceptions, can't we? I can think of many righteous people—much more righteous than I—who have suffered terribly in this life, more than I have, without evidence of any extraordinary sinfulness. By all accounts, they lived exemplary (good by example) lives. Yet, some of them died young; some lived much of their lives in sickness; others suffered extreme poverty; etc. The pages of church history, and recent stories (cf. James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*), are replete (full) with the examples of godly men and women whose lives were strewn with suffering and pain. And while Ps. 1 produces the Biblical

version of retributive justice, other psalmists acknowledged the exceptions to the general rule of sowing and reaping. In Ps. 73 the psalmist came close to stumbling—"loosing his religion" (?)—because of the obvious exceptions to this general principle of retribution.

> Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant *As* I saw the ***prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind.*** Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of *their* heart run riot. They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore his people return to this place, ***And waters of abundance are drunk by them.*** They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; ***And always at ease, they have increased in wealth***. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning (vv. 1-14).

To this psalmist, the reverse principle seemed to be true, that the wicked were ***always*** the prosperous ones and the righteous were ***always*** the ones in trouble. Thus, he goes to the opposite extreme of absolutizing the reverse of retributive justice. Of course, he is allowed by the Holy Spirit to do so in order to make a point—one he realizes toward the end of the psalm—that the history of a person's life on earth does not reveal his final end. No matter how well the wicked gets on in this present life he will suffer a certain judgment beyond the grave (vv. 17-20). Furthermore, no matter how much suffering the righteous man endures in this life, God Himself is his ultimate possession and inheritance, and this reward should be more than adequate compensation for all his earthly troubles (vv. 21-28).

We encounter many other themes in the book including how a very exemplary believer can come "unglued" with extreme suffering. And if we cannot somewhat sympathize with Job's reaction to suffering, we may with the help of the Holy Spirit uncover an unhealthy strain of self-righteousness coursing through our spiritual veins. All of us would like to believe the best about ourselves, but confronted with extreme suffering, both physical and emotional, we may one day find that we are not the spiritual giants we imagined ourselves to be. None of us really knows how we will react when God "sharpens the knife of His providence on our bones" (Henry Krabbendam, *James*). We might react far more poorly than Job. Whatever happens, we may be assured that God has a merciful and gracious purpose in our suffering, along with a consuming interest in His sovereign glory.

I. The Prologue (chp. 1-2)

A. Introduction of Job (1: 1-5)

Job was from the land of Uz, an unknown location. The important part of this introduction is the description of Job's character: "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil." Thus, from the very beginning of the book, there is no doubt that Job's suffering is ***not*** the result of some terrible sin in his life. But the author is not content to declare Job's innocence only once, but three times in the same prologue (1: 1, 8; 2: 3). The author is not forming his own independent opinion of Job's character; rather, he is relaying to the reader the divine, omniscient assessment his character, for in v. 8 God confidently gives His own imprimatur (approval) of Job in the presence of Satan, "The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away

from evil." Furthermore, this confidence is not betrayed after the first round of Job's suffering, for after his wealth is lost and his children are dead, Job refuses to relinquish (give up) his hope in God (vv. 21-22), and God continues to boast in Job's righteousness, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.'" Job's righteousness becomes legendary, for he is listed in Ezekiel along with Noah and Daniel as one of the most righteous men of all times (Hartley, p. 67; citing Ezek. 14: 14, 20). Thus, we see that we are not dealing with fiction in the book of *Job*, but history. The story is about a real man who lived in time and space (cf. James 5: 11) although the story is told in poetic genre (form).

There is much theology in v. 1 which should not be overlooked. Job's blamelessness and uprightness is defined as "fearing God and turning away from evil". It has become somewhat unpopular to speak of the believer as one who ***fears*** God. After all, perfect love casts out fear, right (1 Jn. 4: 18)? Somehow such fear has been relegated (set aside as inferior) as the outmoded mentality of the OT believer which is unworthy of the NT Christian. This is surprising in view of the fact that Jesus tells us to fear God who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10: 28; same word used as in 1 Jn. 4: 18—*phobeo*). The believer should entertain no ***craven*** fear of God as a judge who is ready to damn him (John's meaning), but God is still a consuming fire who hates sin. He is our heavenly Father who disciplines His children, not our indulgent grandfather who allows us to sin without correction. Job clearly understood the holiness of God, for he feared displeasing Him, a disposition (attitude) which caused him to turn away from evil. Secondly, blamelessness is not defined here as merely a ***state*** of heart but an ***activity***. True uprightness consists in continual repentance and diligent avoidance of evil. Several features of Job's righteousness are mentioned within the text of *Job*: careful avoidance of looking lustfully at women (31: 1), avoidance of greed and a positive effort to care for the poor (29: 12; 31: 16-32). Job's righteousness was not theoretical, but practical, which is why God corrects Job's three friends at the end of the story.

Seven sons and three daughters are not only literal but possibly symbolic of the perfect family. Seven (a perfect number) plus three equals ten—a number signifying completeness. Sons were considered more valuable in the ancient world because of their ability to carry on the family name and to amass wealth. Job's material possessions were enormous—7000 sheep plus 3000 camels equals 10,000 animals, another complete number. Added to this were 500 yoke of oxen which were apparently needed to cultivate a sizeable farm and 500 female donkeys to transport the considerable produce to the markets. To maintain such an estate, Job had many servants. Riches alone are never condemned in the OT or the NT. Job's care of the poor mentioned later in the text indicates that he was able and willing to care for those who were not blessed with abundant wealth. If being rich, by itself, were a sin, then the author of *Job* missed an excellent opportunity to instruct us otherwise. Job, a very rich man, "the greatest [in material wealth] of all the men of the east", was also blameless and upright in the eyes of God. What distinguishes Job from the rich fool of Lk. 12: 16-21 was that Job did not store up treasure for himself, but was rich toward God (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 17-19). God grants wealth for the purpose of using this wealth to glorify His name. If wealth is hoarded only for our personal pleasures and is not used to help others, then God is not glorified.

Not only was Job rich, he successfully taught his sons to be generous. His sons regularly invited their unmarried (assumed from the text) sisters to feasts held in their houses (v. 4). We may also assume from this gesture that they were generous to their sisters in other ways.

This setting is strong evidence for an early dating for Job during the patriarchal period of Abraham—or between Abraham and Moses—before the Levitical priesthood. Job seems to offer the burnt offerings himself without a priest. It could be argued that he does so through the medium of a Levitical priest who is not mentioned in the text, but this is highly unlikely and is reading into the text. The important part of this verse is not that he offers sacrifices for his children, but that he does so just in case one of them curses God in a moment of rash, presumptuous sin, the very thing his wife counsels him to do after the third round of calamity (2: 9). Cursing God "to His face" is the very sin Satan suggests Job will commit if God allows Job's affliction (1: 11). Such sacrifices formed a regular part of Job's worship of God ("continually"), indicating that his faith was not mere adherence to a moral code, but the worship of the true God. Although commitment to God consists in more than religious ritual (Isa. 1), it nevertheless does not omit the importance of formal worship.

B. The First Heavenly Scene (1: 6-12)

The sons of God are angelic beings who were presenting themselves before God to give an accounting of their activities. The Bible does not tell us much about the activity of angels, but Heb. 1: 14 informs us that they are "all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation". An example of this is found in Dan. 10: 12 when an angel (not the theophany of Christ found in vv. 1-9) shows up in answer to Daniel's prayers. Angels continually declare the holiness of God (Isa. 6), but this is apparently not all they do; they are actively involved in the salvation of God's elect people.

Does Satan Have Access to God?

Along with the angels, Satan appears. This presents many questions which are not necessarily germane (important) to the book of *Job* but are important theologically. How does Satan, a fallen angel, appear alongside unfallen angels ***in the presence of God***? Are we to conclude that Satan has continual access to God's throne? According to the context, Satan does not appear as a ***permanent member*** of the assembly of the sons of God, but as an ***intruder*** (Hartley, p. 72; notice the phrase, "and Satan also came ***among*** them", not as a member, but as an outsider). Revelation 12: 10 presents Satan as the "accuser of our brethren", one who stands before God continually ("day and night") as a prosecuting attorney (Hartley, p. 71-72) who presents legal accusations against the saints. But notice from *Revelation* that when Christ was born, a "war in heaven" (v. 7) was set in motion between the dragon (Satan) and the heavenly angels resulting in the defeat of Satan and his angels and their being thrown down to the earth. It is unwise to formulate any strict theology of Satan and fallen angels from these verses, but it may be true that Satan had access to God ***before*** the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, but no longer has such direct access because of the atoning work of Christ. Because of this atoning work, he is thrown out of heaven and no longer has the privilege of accusing us before God's throne. It is expressly stated in Rev. 12: that "the ***accuser of our brethren*** has been thrown down". Paul refers to the accusations of Satan when he says, "***Who will bring a charge against God's elect?*** God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? ***Christ Jesus is He who died***, yes, rather ***who***

was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8: 33-34). With Christ the crucified and risen Lord interceding for the saints at the right hand of God the Father, Satan's attempts to accuse us are fruitless and futile. God the Father has justified us on the basis of the atoning death of Christ which He has fully accepted as just payment of our sins. So what can Satan do about that? Nothing! "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8: 1). Before the resurrection of Christ, however, Satan could justly accuse the saints of sinful unworthiness before the thrown of God. They were flawed human beings who had failed miserably to measure up to the standards of His moral law given to man at creation (Gen. 4: 10-11; 17: 1b). For the time being, the sacrifices of bulls and goats served to atone temporarily for the sins of God's people until the once and for all atonement of Christ could be accomplished (Heb. 10: 4).

Satan is also presented in Job 1: 7 as having the ability to roam about on the earth, and this ability continues ***after*** the cross. Peter warns us of his schemes, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5: 8).

Satan's Accusation: Job loves God only for His material benefits.

Satan's ***accusations*** against Job are in response to God's ***recommendations***. According to God's own testimony, Job is a man without reproach. Satan challenges this assessment, just as he has challenged what God had said from the beginning of man, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3: 1) His accusation against Job is of utmost importance to our understanding of the ***purpose*** of *Job*. ***His argument is that the only reason Job is righteous and serves God is for the material benefits Job receives from Him***: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" God had put a fence of protection around Job and his family. On every side God had blessed him with material abundance; everything he had done had prospered—the stated reward for obedience (Ps. 1: 3b). If only God would take away Job's material abundance, there would no longer be any reason for him to worship God. Thus, Satan does not attack Job's outward behavior, which by God's own account is blameless; but he attacks Job's ***motives*** for being righteous. He may be righteous, Satan argues, but he is righteous for the wrong reason—just to get something in return from God.

The importance of this accusation cannot be overestimated, for this is the crux (essence) of the matter for every believer who ever lived. ***What is our reason for serving God?*** Do we serve Him only to get some material benefit from Him in this present world? And if God does not deliver on our forecasts (predictions) of material return, is it worth our trouble or inconvenience of worshiping Him? Is this not the temptation confronting the psalmist in Ps. 73: "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence" (v. 13). The book of *Job* is written partly for the purpose of presenting the proper motive for loving God—not for what God does for us ***materially*** although His material benefits are considerable—but for who He is and for what He does and will do for us ***spiritually and eternally***. Jesus came to save His people from their sins, not from earthly troubles. While it is true that God offers material rewards for obedience (Deut. 28: 1-14), the material rewards should draw our primary attention to the spiritual reward of knowing God as Savior (Rom. 2: 4; Ex. 20: 2-3). God delivered Israel from their bondage in Egypt and brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey, but the primary purpose in His kindness was to receive their worship (Ex. 10: 3).

The story forces us to ask ourselves some hard questions. What if our lives are strewn with suffering and hardship while the lives of more serious sinners appear easy by comparison? Will we conclude that our faith has been for nothing? The story of Job answers this question by instructing us that knowing God is valuable and good for its own sake even when everything else falls apart. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and He also created us (Job 38-41). The value of knowing this creator is, therefore, not debatable. Thus, we should not have to speculate about the relative value of our faith in God in comparison with earthly good. Even if the very worst happens to us in this life, God is more valuable than life itself; and we should be able to say with the psalmist—who finally came to his senses (73: 15-24)—"Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (73: 25-26; cf. Job 23: 12).

The Apostle Paul concludes that ***without the resurrection***, Christians are the most pitiful people on earth, for they have denied themselves many of the sensual pleasures which others grasp (1 Cor. 15: 32) with no hope for anything else. However, those who die in Christ Jesus ***are, indeed, resurrected*** to eternal life in Christ, and the sufferings they endure in this life are nothing in comparison with the glory which will one day be revealed to them (Rom. 8: 18). However, Job did not have the benefit of Pauline theology and did not have a clear understanding of life beyond the grave.

Does God have the right to do with us as He pleases?

It should be noted that the author of Job takes us behind the curtain of this epic drama and gives us an inside look at what is going on while Job is left completely in the dark. He does not know that God is going to permit Satan to conduct an experiment with his life (v. 12). God tells Satan how far he can go in afflicting Job but allows him to go no farther—"only do not put forth your hand on him". This restriction will be withdrawn later on when God allows Satan to afflict Job with wasting diseases; but at first, Satan could only take away his wealth in material goods and children. This brings up yet another question: ***Does God have the prerogative (right) to experiment with us?*** Does He have the right to use us to prove an argument with Satan? The sovereignty of God over the lives of His creatures pervades the entire story of Job. Later on in the story Job raises the ethical question of whether God is allowed to afflict him given the fact that he had not sinned as his friends had claimed. We might also ask: Does God have the right to do anything He wants to do with ***our lives*** in order to prove that we love Him for Himself rather than what He does for us? The answer, of course, is yes. God has this right, for His ultimate concern is not to provide us with a care-free life but to glorify Himself. And how better to glorify Himself than to prove to Satan, and to the world, that believers will worship him and love Him no matter what happens to them (cf. Dan. 3: 17-18). It should be obvious that God has nothing to prove to ***Himself***, for He is omniscient and already knew the end of Job's story—as well as ours. Nevertheless, there is something to prove to the world of skeptics, and God desires to glorify Himself with the worship and obedience of His children in ***all kinds*** of situations—in poverty or riches, in hunger or in plenty (Phil. 4: 11-13). Our love for God in the midst of suffering is one of the most effective means of evangelism.

Furthermore, the desperation we often feel is aggravated by our ignorance of what is going on in the heavenly places of God's providence. Trials and suffering come our way, but we are left in the dark about ***why*** we are suffering. Have we committed a terrible sin? Are we under God's

judgment? Our close friends may tell us so, and since we are sinners, this is a distinct possibility; but it is not necessarily the correct conclusion. Job was ***not*** suffering because he was a terrible sinner. And just as Job is left in the dark and must endure the speculations of his friends about his guilt, we are also left in the dark about our suffering. Are we willing to be exhibits to the glory of God?

Satan's Limitations [See Dabney, ST, p. 272]

There are many implications from this passage about ***Satan's limitations.*** Satan is not omnipotent (all-powerful) but ***must ask God's permission*** to afflict Job. Although he is described as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4: 4), we should not give him too much credit by ascribing too much power to him. Satan is the god of this world in the sense that he is ***allowed*** to "blind the minds of the unbelieving" and to afflict us with God's permission (Job 1: 13-22). He is powerful, but not ***omnipotent***, and his power is no match for God's. He is also not ***omniscient*** (all-knowing) like God is. If he were all-knowing, he would have known that his accusation against Job was groundless, for in the end Job never "curses God to His face" as Satan was confident that he would do. Likewise, he would have known that Job was not worshipping God for His material benefits. Satan's experiment with Job did not yield the results he wanted or expected.

C. Job's Misfortune (1: 13-22)

Job's calamity is so swift and so severe that the events of this passage hardly seem credible to us. It is not likely the calamities occurred at the same time, but were separated by weeks. Yet the individual reports of the calamities took place one after another with no relief (The purpose of the book is accentuated by the intensity of the affliction. Many people lose their material wealth and the people who help them to attain it—servants and employees. Many parents lose their child, even more than one child. But few have suffered as Job has suffered, losing so much in so short a time.

Once again, the passage brings up many theological questions.

How powerful is Satan?

It is not difficult for us to believe that Satan can use wicked people to harm others. When we read of the destruction of Job's servants by Sabeans and Chaldeans, we are not surprised, but when we read that Satan employed the forces of nature ("the fire of God" or lightning; Hartley, p. 76, and a "great wind") to kill other servants, livestock, and his children, we are made to pause and reflect. To what extent has God given the forces of nature into the hand of Satan to afflict others? Can Satan actually cause lightning and devastating winds? Are Christians, then, defenseless against the onslaughts of the devil? But we should take a more careful look at the text.

The fire which "fell from ***heaven***" is not the "fire of ***Satan***", but the "fire of ***God***" (v. 16). Can we not, then, assume that just as Satan had to ask permission to afflict Job in the first place that he also had to ask God to send down lightning or create a turbulent storm to accomplish this goal? It would be unwarranted from the text to assume that Satan has this capability, as if every

natural disaster (floods, fire, famine, lightening) which plagues mankind is caused by Satan who is bent on destroying people. Satan's purpose is not to destroy people per se, but to destroy the kingdom of God. The permission given to Satan on this occasion is not a "blank check" Satan can cash ***every time*** he wishes to afflict people, and to use this passage to prove this would be a gross misinterpretation. Such a conclusion would be in direct conflict with Scripture which teaches that calamity comes from the hand of God who uses it to punish wickedness (Isa. 45: 7; Joel 2: 1-11), and in this case, to test righteousness.
It would also be unwise to conclude that any of Satan's accomplices (demonic or human) can do what Satan is given permission to do in this passage. A similar story has been told by a missionary about an African witch doctor who supposedly called down lightning to kill a Christian pastor (Long, *Man with a Straw Hat*). Without minimizing the threat of demonic opposition to the gospel, should we conclude that God puts Christians at the mercy of witch doctors? It is unlikely that witch doctors would first ask God's permission to cast lightning from heaven, but this is precisely what Satan had to do on this occasion. Only God can cause lightning; and if Satan uses it for evil, he must do so by asking God to produce it and, then, to direct it to a specific purpose. As a missionary in Africa, I am personally not alarmed at the possibility of being killed by a lightning bolt called down from heaven by an angry witch doctor. I am far more frightened by the "demons" who are riding on the hoods of so many reckless African drivers. None of this denies the obvious fact that Satan is directly involved in Job's sufferings. What is denied is a theology of Satan which allows him indiscriminate power to produce suffering.

Notice from the text of 2: 3 that God takes full responsibility for Job's suffering, "...you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." Hartley's analysis is to the point,

> He [God] would not concede any of his authority to the Satan. This point is crucial, for in the dialogue Job will seek deliverance ***from Yahweh alone and rightly so, for he has no battle with the Satan***. This statement also explains why the Satan does not reappear in the epilogue. Yahweh himself feels obliged to resolve the conflict for Job (p. 80; emphasis mine).

D. The Second Heavenly Scene (2: 1-7a)

Satan's first experiment ends in failure, for "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God" (1: 22). He recognized, as should we, that God has the right to give and He has the right to take away what He has given. We have brought nothing into the world, and we shall take nothing out of it (1: 21). In this second heavenly scene, God is quick to point out to Satan that he was wrong about Job (v. 3). But Satan remains unconvinced. At the very base of man's being is the will to survive; and so far, nothing has been done to Job to threaten his physical survival. If only Satan is allowed to afflict Job's body, he will curse God to His face (vv. 4-5). Notice again that Satan needs God's cooperation in the matter, "put forth ***Thy*** hand". Satan alone cannot cause the illness without the express permission of God. God cooperates by turning Job over to Satan to do with him what he wishes short of killing him (v. 6). God does not relinquish authority over Job's life, but permits Satan to have his way up to a specified point.

The lives of men are not the domain of Satan. To believe otherwise is to admit that there are areas in which God's authority does not hold sway. In a special way believers are in the hands of God who will not allow us to be tempted or persecuted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10: 13). Even in the case of persistent, unrepentant sin, a professing Christian in the Corinthian

church was "delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh [i.e. his sinful behavior] that [in order that] his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5: 5). Job had not grievously sinned, yet God is doing the same to him on this occasion—delivering him over to Satan, not for the destruction of his sinful behavior, but to test him and try him so that he would emerge as a shining example of persistent faith. Had Job understood that this was a test, and that he was not being punished by God for sinfulness, his pain would have been easier to bear. As it was, he was not privy (did not know) to what God was doing. On the other hand, we now have from *Job* the authoritative inside information which helps us make some sense of our suffering. It still could be true that we are under some kind of discipline and that our situation is different from Job's. If so, we must ask God to reveal our sin to us and grant us repentance and restoration (Ps. 32: 3; 119: 67). On the other hand, our suffering may have nothing to do with personal sin but is given to us as a test to help us grow in our faith (James 1: 2-4; where the word "trials" in v. 2 has the same root as "tempted" in v. 13). What God uses to ***test*** us or ***try*** us, Satan uses to ***tempt*** us. The very same occasion is both an ***instrument of blessing*** from God and an ***instrument of affliction*** from Satan. In the same way that Satan asked permission to afflict Job, he also asked permission (not "demanded" as NAS and NAB translate) to "sift" Peter "like wheat" (Lk. 22: 31). Apparently Satan thought he could also make a negative example out of Peter to the rest of Jesus' followers, and to a limited extent he succeeded, but not ultimately. Peter repented, and his failure apparently served the Lord's purpose in humbling him and making him less dependent on himself and more dependent upon God, for he became the first among the apostles. God also permitted "a messenger of Satan to buffet" Paul for the same purpose, a purpose which Paul himself recognized, "to keep me from exalting myself!", a phrase mentioned twice in the same verse (2 Cor. 12: 7). While Paul did not care much for his "thorn in the flesh" and asked God repeatedly to get rid of it (vv. 7-8), God let him know in no uncertain terms that this was just what Paul needed to accomplish his ministry: "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (v. 9a). Paul's conclusion, then, was that his affliction was actually a good thing: "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (v. 9b). We will learn later that Job's afflictions served the same benevolent purpose (42: 1-6).

Since God is the sovereign, controlling authority, He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). Thus, unlike Job, we are no longer completely in the dark about our suffering—if we read the book of *Job* and related NT texts! This will not give us complete relief in our suffering, but it will give us the assurance that our suffering is not meaningless.

E. Job's Physical Affliction (2: 7b-10)

Having God's permission, Satan leaves His presence with enthusiasm to do his dirty work. He is confident that this next experiment will prove his thesis: that men do not serve God for nothing, but for what he gives them—in this case, a healthy body. Satan then afflicts Job with a painful disease (2: 13), or diseases, affecting his skin. The disease apparently disfigured Job's face so much that even his close friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar did not recognize him (2: 12). Job's wife, having lost her own children and now having to watch her husband suffer for no apparent reason, encourages him to curse God and die, assuming that some measure of relief will be given him for doing so. With this suggestion she actually increases Job's suffering rather than diminishing it. There is nothing as consoling during a trial as the support of one's spouse, but

when the spouse is adversarial (at odds), the suffering is made worse. This is the only time Job's wife is mentioned in the story. She may have been the mother of seven more sons and three more daughters at the end of the story, or Job may have remarried (42: 13). We are not told. Her absence from the rest of the story highlights the loneliness of Job throughout the entire ordeal. There was none to comfort him, not even his wife, whose emotional distance actually made matters worse.

Job's response is classic for its acceptance of God's providence, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" It's a good question which all of us should ponder, for all of us are tempted to praise God for good things but grumble at the bad things. Lingering deep inside of us is the root of ***entitlement***—because I serve God, He ***owes*** me a peaceful, quiet, and prosperous life. For the second time the author emphasizes that in all of his sorrow, Job did not sin. In this particular affliction, he "did not sin with his lips", the most difficult of all sins to avoid, the sin of the tongue (James 3: 2; cited by Hartley, p. 84).

F. Introduction of the Three Friends (2: 11-13)

It is clear from the text that the three men who came to see Job did not come to gloat over his misery but to "sympathize with him and comfort him". They were "friends", not enemies pretending to be friends, whom Job calls his "brothers" (Hartley, p. 85). When they first saw Job and discovered how disfigured he was, they wept and threw dust on their heads as a sign of mourning. Furthermore, they took considerable time before they began attempting to counsel with Job, saying nothing for seven days and nights (v. 13), a period which corresponded to the length of time for mourning the death of a loved one (Gen. 50: 10; Hartley, p. 86).

II. Job's Curse-Lament (chp. 3)

The first verse of the chapter provides the summary. Job curses the day of his birth, wishing he had never been born. He also brings up the related question of why God allows the birth of others who are destined to suffer (v. 20). Would it not be more compassionate for God not to give them birth at all or, at least, to grant them death rather than continued existence in suffering (vv. 21-22). The urgent question arises here whether Job sins by wishing for his death. Hartley maintains that if Job had sinned in this lament, his claims to innocence would have been hollow (p. 101). I disagree. There is never any presumption in the book, even by Job, that he had not sinned at all, only that he had not sinned grievously enough to deserve his calamities. In light of his pain, such a lament is understandable. We can sympathize with Job's pain, and it is likely we would fair far worse spiritually in similar circumstances even in the light of more complete revelation. However, we cannot excuse Job for wishing to never have been born. Life belongs to God, and we are His to accomplish His purpose. If any person, however insignificant, had never been born, it would only prove that there was no purpose for his existence. Our very existence proves purpose. We may give Job credit, however, in making no attempt to take his own life.

III. The Dialogue (chps. 4-27)

A. The First Cycle of Speeches (chps. 4-14)

1. Eliphaz (chps. 4-5)

Eliphaz's speech is the first response to Job and is the first speech to introduce the ***doctrine of retribution***. "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?" (4: 7) On the other hand, "those who sow trouble harvest it" (4: 8). The law of sowing and reaping is clearly stated here. A person invariably reaps what he sows—***no exceptions***. His argument is marked by subtlety (indirectness) in that he ***does not directly accuse Job of being a great sinner***, for he says, "Can mankind [anyone] be just before God? Can a man [any man] be pure before his Maker?" (4: 17) In other words, who's perfect? The obvious answer is: No one, Job included. Job has claimed to be innocent, but according to Eliphaz's generalization, ***none*** are innocent. A man's troubles do not "sprout from the ground"; i.e. they do not come from no where without someone causing them (5: 6-7). The implication is that Job is in trouble because he has brought trouble on himself. But all will be well if Job places himself at the mercy of God (5: 8). God disciplines His creatures; he inflicts the pain, but He also heals (5: 17-18). Job is obviously under severe discipline from the Lord, and the wise response would be to submit to this discipline. If he does submit, he will be delivered from all his troubles (5: 19-26). After much investigation of the matter, Eliphaz and his co-counselors have come to the conclusion that this is way it is—always. Job should, therefore, listen to them and learn this for himself (v. 27).

Eliphaz has good intentions. He sees discipline as the means by which God is warning Job of further danger if he remains unrepentant (Hartley, p. 125). If Job repents, his afflictions will be reversed, but if not, he will only slip more dangerously into ruin. He desperately wishes for Job to see the error of his ways and be restored. We may learn from this that our good intentions are not enough when we are counseling others. We must also be correct in what we say. While there is much truth in what he says, the error is the assumption that double retribution (good for obedience and evil for disobedience) operates without exception. Job should therefore do good so that he will once more enjoy God's good graces. Thus, Eliphaz has unknowingly aligned himself with Satan in motivating Job to love God for the material benefits. Piety is profitable. "Failing to discern that Job is sorely troubled by bearing suffering for no reason at all (cf. 2: 3), Eliphaz by his counsel tempts Job to seek God for personal gain, not for God himself" (Hartley, p. 129).

2. Job (chps. 6-7)

Job is not convinced by Eliphaz's arguments for he knows that grievous sin is not the reason for his suffering. Rather than listening to Job's lament seriously, Eliphaz has eliminated the possibility of any exception to the doctrine of retribution, or more precisely, the theology of retribution. Quite often in our haste to help people by "fixing" their problems, we fail to entertain the possibility that our cherished theological notions may be flawed. For example, when we read Ps. 1 about the blessings upon the righteous and the troubles upon the wicked, it would be very convenient for us to interpret all of life through the grid of this passage and come up with the theology of retribution as Eliphaz did. Other psalms and proverbs would lead us to this conclusion were they not tempered and moderated by other passages of Scripture—most notably the book of *Job* and *Ecclesiastes.* Sometimes we will find that experience itself will force us to reexamine what we ***think*** the Bible teaches. Experience itself will teach us that the wicked often prosper while the righteous suffer. Therefore, when we come to passages like Psalm 1, we begin to understand that these are general promises for the righteous which are true

in many ways both in this life but surely in the life to come. Yet, they are not meant to be absolute promises with no exceptions in the present world. If we fail to recognize the exceptions, we will fail to apply the passages properly and will become poor counselors along with Eliphaz.

In chapters 6-7, Job continues to maintain his innocence and to vent his frustrations. He feels like God is using him for target practice, and His arrows are sticking out all over him (v. 4; Hartley, p. 132). He wishes that God would not hold back from finishing him off but would go ahead and put him to death (vv. 8-9). He is not made of stone or bronze, and he doesn't know how much more his body can take of God's abuse (v. 12). He feels betrayed by his friends with whom he has had a close bond of covenant friendship (vv. 14-15; Hartley, p. 136). Like the vanishing streams from melted ice and snow, and like caravans which perish in the desert from lack of water, the covenant companionship of his friends has vanished (vv. 15-20). They even refuse to look at him when they are trying to correct him (v. 28).

At this point in the dialogue, Job reveals that he has been suffering for months, perhaps many months which have turned into years (7: 3). His illness consists in sleeplessness, skin ulcers, and running sores which are infested with worms (Hartley, p. 145; vv. 4-5). His life is worse than the hardship of the common working man who barely makes a living from day to day (vv. 1-2). His has no hope for the future (v. 7) and no hope of returning from Sheol, the realm of the dead (7: 9-10). We will discuss the OT view of the afterlife later when we look at Job 19: 26. At least from this passage we can see that Job has no optimism for his future either in this life or beyond the grave.

He can only wonder why someone as insignificant as he would be the object of so much of God's wrath. Is he some kind of threatening monster? (vv. 12-18). Notice v. 17 which is also quoted in Ps. 8: 4 and 144: 3. While the psalmist uses this expression in a positive way to praise God for exalting man as His image and imputing significance and importance to him, Job uses the same phrase in a negative way. God takes note of man to watch over him and examine everything he does to make sure man measures up to His standard. Consequently, man cannot bear the burden of God's surveillance (v. 18; cf. v. 20 "O watcher of men" which Job also uses in the negative sense of God watching over him not to bless but to curse). Job wishes that he were not the object of God's attention which has become burdensome to him. Better that He would look the other way and let Job alone (v. 19). What has he done to God that He would make him a target of his wrath? (v. 20; cf. 6: 4).

Don't we feel this way sometimes? When trouble comes in by a flood, we get the distinct impression that God is standing by as a cruel taskmaster, his whip poised above our heads, just waiting for us to do something else wrong so He can whack us. We can all empathize (feel the same way) with Job's subjectively ***mistaken view of God***. Remember that Job did not have the privilege of sitting in on the heavenly counsel when God and Satan were discussing his future examination. As far as he was concerned, God was angry with him. He does not know what God ***objectively thought of him***, and that God had given him high marks of praise—"For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil." He only knew what he was experiencing. However, what we ***experience*** is not the best criteria (standard) of determining God's relationship to us. To give Job credit, he lived in a day of incomplete revelation, and we have no right to blame him for not knowing what we should

know from the completed canon of Scripture. God has given us this story to uncover the feelings of our own hearts when calamity befalls us, and we should not be surprised to feel much the same way Job felt when life seemed to be falling apart. But we must guard against rushing to conclusions that God is angry or that God does not love us just because our outward circumstances are bad. Job came to this conclusion, one which we know was mistaken from the very beginning of the book. We know objectively from Scripture that God loves His children with an everlasting love and that His discipline is for the purpose of sanctification. Thus, when trouble comes, we can hang on to this objective truth and apply it subjectively to our particular situation.

3. Bildad (chp. 8)

This is the first speech of Bildad which is far more harsh that that of Eliphaz. He is far more forthright in his defense of the doctrine of retribution. While Eliphaz did not directly accuse Job of sin, Bildad does just that. "If you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate" (v. 6). God does not pervert justice; he delivers affliction in accordance to a man's just deserts. The obvious inference is that since Job is still suffering, he is ***not*** pure and upright. Moreover, Job's children were also not pure and righteous, otherwise, God would not have destroyed them the way he did (v. 4). We see, then, that although Bildad had good intentions toward Job, he is utterly insensitive to his severe losses. Job had recently lost all ten of his children to a violent storm which blew a house down on top of them, and now Bildad is insisting that the reason for their death is the same as his suffering. Apparently, they also had sinned and received the just punishment for their sin. Otherwise, we must accuse God of the perversion of justice, something which cannot be true of God (v. 3).

How can a good God allow the innocent to suffer? This has been a raging question from the beginning of man. Bildad answers the question on the basis of retribution theology. God does not allow the ***innocent*** to suffer, at least not like Job is suffering. For God to do allow this would be a perversion of justice which cannot be ascribed to Him. Therefore, it must be true that Job, as well as his children, had done something exceedingly sinful to deserve such treatment. If Job were innocent, God would restore him to his former blessed estate (v. 6), but since God has not done this, Job is still in sin.

At this point, Bildad offers Job a history lesson. The traditions of the fathers have always held that the wicked suffer while the righteous prosper (v. 8). For Job to believe otherwise is pure arrogance since he has existed only a short while compared to many generations of wise men (v. 9). Man's life withers quickly like the papyrus without the marsh (v. 11); it is as frail as a spider's web (v. 14). God will not reject Job if he is truly a righteous man, but if he is evil, God will not support him in his sin (vv. 20-22).

Thus, Bildad holds tenaciously to the theology of retribution as taught by tradition, and Job's experience does not present a serious challenge to it. All of us are somewhat bound by the traditions we have been taught since we were young. Some of these traditions are true, and we should not make the mistake of throwing away all the cherished traditions of our fathers. However, we have at least one inspired example here in the book of *Job* of a theological tradition which is in error—the theology of retribution, that God ***always*** blesses the righteous and He ***always*** punishes the wicked. This is true beyond the grave, but there are exceptions to the rule in

this present life. Bildad maintains that it is absolutely true without exception in this life. However wrong it is, Bildad and the others hold to it tightly. We can be guilty of the same error—holding to a theological tradition not because it is exegetically proven from Scripture, but because we have always been taught this way. As soon as someone points out a different interpretation, we immediately scoff at him by invoking our theological tradition.

4. Job (chps. 9-10)

Job agrees with Bildad for the most part, that the wicked are punished and the righteous prosper and that God cannot pervert justice (v. 2a). Yet, he argues, how can a man's ways be beyond reproach as far as God is concerned? Job does not claim to be sinlessly perfect (v. 2b), and he realizes that if sinless perfection is required for God's blessings, neither he nor anyone else is qualified to receive them. He then begins to speak in legal terms (Hartley, pp. 165-166). If anyone entered into litigation (a legal dispute) with God (v. 3), he would not be able to answer God's accusations against him, even if he were innocent (vv.15, 20). God is all-powerful and has no equal who can stand against Him (vv. 5-12). Who can say unto God, "What are you doing? (v.12b). In view of God's power, it is useless to argue his case before God—even though Job does just that later on in the story.

We should note the typological value of v. 3. Before God's court of justice, everyone is speechless. No mortal man, not even one (Rom. 3: 10-12), can successfully argue his case before a holy God who demands absolute perfection. But there is one man, the God-man Jesus Christ, who can argue our case before the Father. He is the incarnate perfection of God, truly God and truly man, who pleads for us not on the basis of our works, but on the basis on his perfect obedience, both his active obedience to the law of God in life and his passive obedience to God in death. On the basis of Christ's work in our behalf, we are genuinely innocent before the Father and will not suffer eternal punishment. But not only are we considered innocent, we are also considered righteous because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us.

The greatest trial for Job at this point in the story is unveiled in the remainder of the chapter. Job believes in a God who is just and righteous; yet, even though he knows that he is innocent of any great sin, it appears that God has already declared him guilty (vv. 20-21). The reader is confronted here with yet another type. Job is a man who suffers in innocence [at least he is innocent of any great sin], yet he does not curse God. His suffering, in turn, causes him to question the justice and goodness of God. At the cross, Christ, the God-man suffered innocently for the sins of the world—both physically and spiritually. Of the two forms of suffering, by far the worst was the temporary separation from God just before His death: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27: 46; cf. Job 13: 24). This question is precisely Job's question—"Why have you forsaken me?" Job does not understand why God has turned His back on him in his innocence. We must be careful not to formulate a one to one comparison between Job's suffering and Christ's suffering. Unlike Job, Christ never questioned the justice and righteousness of God and while Job was only ***comparatively*** innocent of any great sin, Christ was ***completely*** innocent of any sin. Nevertheless, His death was certainly the supreme example of the suffering of an innocent person who remained steadfast in His faith in God. Just as Job never curses God throughout his entire ordeal, neither does Christ. In this sense, Job is a type of Christ, an innocent man who suffers at the hands of God.

How can God use the death of His sinless son to accomplish redemption for sinners? Is this not unjust? The answer is obvious. The ways of God cannot be questioned. He can do as He pleases. The death of Christ proved that God can be both just and the "justifier" of one who has faith in Christ (Rom. 3: 26). Likewise, no one can question the justice of God in afflicting Job. At the end of the story, the glory of God will shine in the example of a just man who suffered without cursing God, and Job will be restored to a measure exceeding his first estate. In the same way, the suffering of Christ unto death did not end in ***injustice***, but in the ***resurrection*** of Christ from the dead and His exaltation at the right hand of God the Father (Phil. 2: 9-11). The story of Job stands as a type all people who have suffered affliction in this life, but whose end is one of glory and triumph. Job's restoration at the end of the story is a type of the future resurrection of all believers.

Nevertheless, at this point in time, Job accuses God of injustice (Hartley, pp. 176-178). "He destroys the guiltless and the wicked. If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent" (vv. 22-23). If God is not the one who is doing such things, "then who is it?" (v. 24b) In other words, if God is the all-powerful one (vv. 5-12) then how else can we explain the suffering of the innocent except to say that God is the one who causes them to suffer? This argument directly challenges the retribution theology of Bildad who maintains that only the wicked suffer. It is patently evident, Job argues, that when many disasters come, they come not only upon the wicked but upon the innocent. "It is all one" (v. 22a); that is, whether one is righteous or unrighteous is not the deciding factor in his suffering. All people, righteous or unrighteous, suffer alike.

Job recognizes that all his efforts to argue his case are useless (vv. 25-32). He also complains that he has no ***mediator*** between him and God (v. 33).

Beginning in ***chapter 10***, Job continues to lament his own life. In a series of rhetorical questions demanding negative answers, he asked if God is limited like a man that He would have to resort to human tests to see if Job is sincere in his faith (vv. 4-6; Hartley, pp. 184-185). The answer to these questions is certainly: No. God has no such limitations, and Job is sure that God knows his innocence. But, if he is innocent, why does God treat him this way? (v. 7) Why would God create him only to destroy him? (vv. 8-12). In secret God concealed the suffering to which He would afflict Job, even while Job was enjoying an abundant life (vv. 12-13; Hartley, p. 188). While enjoying God's good blessings, Job had no idea about the terrible ordeal God had planned for him, and while God had been watching over him and protecting him, He had also been watching every move Job was making waiting for him to make a mistake in order to punish him (v. 14).

Hartley has noted the legal tone of Job's speech as well as its typology.

> God the plaintiff [one who brings a suit against another in a court of law], has failed to inform Job, the defendant, of his accusation. If a defendant is not informed in a reasonable amount of time, he has the right to take his accuser to court and demand a resolution. The possibility of exercising his rights as a defendant dominates Job's thinking in this speech....Every person stands in need of an advocate in order to face God. Job's thinking is working with the same inner logic that stands behind the core teaching of the NT, that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has become the Mediator, the Arbiter, between God and man. Finding no hope in a legal settlement, Job turns to lament his plight. He pleads for God to show him mercy (p. 192, words in brackets mine).

The reader must keep in mind that Job is exposing his heart in the midst of his severe emotional, spiritual, and physical pain. His suffering has caused him to question many of the traditional beliefs about God and His ways with His people—traditions which even he believed before his severe suffering. He is, therefore, not setting forth the doctrine of God for the believer. While his friends have preached the traditional doctrine of double retribution—that God always blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked—Job's suffering has caused him to question this doctrine. In his questioning, Job has gone over the edge, so to speak, in formulating a different doctrine of God—the picture of a stern, vindictive judge who is ready to condemn the innocent without cause (cf. 9: 17). As I have said, there is an element of truth in retribution, but it is not true in an absolute sense with no exceptions. God does punish the wicked and bless the righteous, but sometimes the wicked are more prosperous in this present world than the righteous, and sometimes the righteous suffer more in this present world than the wicked. God commonly blesses the wicked, causing his sun to rise on both the good and the evil, and sending needed rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5: 45). This is known as "common grace" which God bestows on all men regardless of belief. It is on this basis that Jesus commands us to love our enemies, for this is precisely what God does (Matt. 5: 44, 45b).

There is also an element of truth in Job's new formulation. God is a holy God who watches the ways of men and punishes their iniquity. He does not miss a single sin which we commit nor does He wink at our sin with indifference. Yet, Job presents God as one who delights in punishing iniquity while other Biblical writers present the true picture of a God who does not delight in the death of the wicked but desires that the wicked turn from his evil way and be saved (Ezek. 33: 11). The psalmist reminds OT believers that if the Lord took account of all men's iniquities, no one could stand before Him (Ps. 130: 3). In the NT, the ultimate manifestation of the goodness and grace of God toward wicked sinners—like us—is the incarnation of His Son and His atoning death on the cross. If God were only interested in condemning us, He would never have sent Christ to die for us.

Likewise, when it comes to Job's description of life after death, the picture represents the very limited understanding of one who lived before the progressive revelation of the NT. Life after death was "the land of darkness and deep shadow; the land of utter gloom as darkness itself, of deep shadow without order, and which shines as the darkness (vv. 21-22). This was Job's conception of Sheol, hardly "the glory which shall be revealed to us" which Paul attempts to describe in Rom. 8: 18-25, the restored heaven and earth.

5. Zophar (chp. 11)

Zophar will have none of Job's arguments and maintains that God is actually holding back part of his punishment (v. 6b; Hartley, p. 197). He also accuses Job of claiming moral perfection, something Job never does (v. 4). The word Job uses in 9: 20 is the word "blameless" meaning that he was a man of moral integrity. Zophar uses the word "pure" or "spotless" or morally perfect. Thus, Zophar puts words in Job's mouth that he never says. Job simply maintains that he had done nothing which deserves his present suffering; but he does not claim moral perfection.

Zophar argues that Job cannot possibly understand the ways of God (vv. 7-9). How then can he accuse God of injustice? He entreats Job to repent as the only solution to his suffering (vv. 14-

15). If he would repent, his troubles would soon be past "as waters that have passed by" or as we say in America, "like water under the bridge (vv. 16-19). Zophar motivates Job to repent on the basis of the renewed blessings which will flow as the result of repentance. In doing this he unwittingly allies himself with Satan who argues that Job worships God only for the benefits he receives from him. Thus, Zophar makes the same mistake as Eliphaz in his first speech (p. 11 of notes and Hartley, p. 204).

6. Job (chps. 12-14)

As in all of Job's responses, he has more to say than his counselors. His sarcasm is evident in v. 2, "And with you wisdom will die!" That is, his friends speak as if all wisdom resides with them. Thus, when they die, wisdom will vanish from the earth. Sarcasm is not necessarily sinful and even Jesus and Paul use it when it suits their purposes (1 Cor. 4: 8; Matt. 23: 29-30).

At one time a very prosperous and respected man, Job now must endure the ridicule of his friends (v. 4). Whether this is an actual fact or just Job's perception is not known, but we all know that material prosperity wins the fragile respect and friendship of others. But when this prosperity evaporates, so do many "friendships" which are based on personal advantage and not love (Lk. 14: 12; Prov. 19: 4-7). It is easy for those who are living in ease or in wealth to hold in contempt those who are suffering (v. 5). This is the way Job feels about his friends who are at the moment isolated from suffering and have little way of understanding what Job is going through. Job also knows that retributive theology does not account fully for the way the world is. "Destroyers" or "marauders", those who steal and plunder the goods of others, seem to dwell safely in their tents while the righteous perish (v. 6; cf. Hartley who sites 5: 24 and 8: 6). Job is contesting previous arguments by his friends that the righteous are always at peace. Creation itself will verify Job's words (vv. 7-10), as well as the history of mankind in which God governs the life and breath of every man regardless of social standing (vv. 13-25).

In ***chapter 13***, Job brushes aside the arguments of his friends who have proved to be "worthless physicians" (v. 4). He wishes that they would be completely silent since nothing they have said has proven valid in his particular circumstances (vv. 5, 13; cf. Prov. 17: 28; cited by Hartley, p. 219). Their intentions have been good, but good intentions alone do not solve problems—only true wisdom which is the proper application of the word of God. By improperly applying the doctrine of retribution to all situations without exception, they have been guilty of putting words into God's mouth (v. 7; "Will you speak what is unjust for God, and speak what is deceitful for Him?"). There is a distinct danger of forcing the word of God to prove our theological traditions. This is what Job's friends were doing by holding to a rigid retribution theology. Hartley says it well,

> Their discourses have glossed over the hard facts of his innocent suffering, for they feel compelled to defend their cherished doctrines at his expense....In defense of God they condemn Job. Their approach, unfortunately, is an ingrained human tendency [common to human nature]. When faced with a perplexing problem, one often tries to get around it or to cover it over with some type of ideological explanation instead of honestly admitting the difficulties involved" (Hartley, p. 219; words in brackets mine).

By nature, we long for answers to difficult questions and do not accommodate well to mystery. We demand that all the "loose ends" of life's problems be tied up in a neat bow-knot. Because of this we are too easily satisfied with traditional explanations to these mysteries which "fit" with

our theological beliefs. Rather than questioning our theology, we too readily accept cheap, insufficient answers. Job's friends are convinced that they have the correct answers to Job's suffering, and they are all too ready to defend their theology at his expense. Yet there is much mystery in God's ways with man and the world, mystery which will not yield to quick and easy answers. Job, for his part, is convinced that his friends will have to answer to God for their mishandling of God's truth and his situation, "Will it be well when he examines you?" (v. 9a) "He will surely reprove you, if you secretly show partiality" (v. 10; i.e. They have prejudiced he whole legal case against Job by assuming God's innocence in the matter. See Hartley, p. 220. Of course, we know that God is always innocent of injustice, but Job's friends have not proven this to be true in this particular case. Job is speaking in the context of a case in court between him and God. Notice the expressions "I will argue" and "prepared my case" in vv. 15 and 18 respectively).

Having given up on his friends, Job appeals directly to God, "But I would speak to the Almighty, and desire to argue with God" (v. 3). Salvation from his suffering will come only if he successfully pleads his case before God (v. 16a), and since the godless man cannot even appear before God, his very appearance before God in court will prove his innocence (v. 16b; Hartley, p. 223). There is much typology in this statement. It is very true that salvation may be found only in God, not just salvation from suffering, but salvation from eternal judgment. To secure this salvation, sinful man must receive his ***acquittal*** (pardon) before the tribunal of God who is the judge of all men. But while Job wishes to argue his case ***himself*** before God's court, the NT makes it clear that no mere mortal can successfully win his acquittal before God—something Job seems to recognize earlier (cf. 9: 3 and the entire discussion of chapter 9). Furthermore, no mere mortal can even appear before God's court, not even the most righteous mortal on earth. To receive pardon we need a divine lawyer, an advocate, who has the moral right to stand before God's court and plead our case. Jesus has that right because He is both perfect God and perfect man. Moreover, He will win acquittal for us because we are united to Him in His perfect humanity. We are genuinely innocent of any and all charges of guilt because this guilt is removed in the atonement of Christ.

Job pleads that God will make known to him his iniquity (v. 23) and to quit treating him as if he were an enemy (v. 24). All his life Job had feared God. This much is certain from God's own assessment of Job's character at the beginning of the book (1: 8). Now, however, Job feels like God's enemy. This sense of abandonment is Job's greatest sorrow, and the Christian who is going through suffering knows such pain. The temptation is to think that somehow he has offended God and that He has removed Himself from him. This is why the book of Job is so valuable to God's people. It teaches us that suffering is not a sign of abandonment. Although Job is unaware of it, God is tenderly watching over him.

In ***chapter 14*** Job acknowledges the frailty and brevity (shortness) of man's life (14: 1-6). If a tree is cut down, a shoot can sprout from the trunk and renew its life, but not so with man. When he lies down, he will not rise (vv. 7-12). Job, therefore, has little if any hope in man's resurrection from the dead. Nevertheless, the ***possibility*** of eternity is in man's heart (Ecc. 3: 11) and so it was with Job. He entertains a glimmer of hope (v. 14a) that God will raise him from Sheol—where he is hidden from God's wrath (v. 13)—and restore even his body to health (v. 14b; "until my change comes"). If this could happen—and he is only speculating on the possibility—he could then endure all the present and future suffering. The assurance of the

resurrection which we possess is the same assurance Job longed for. He also longs for the possibility that God's wrath against him will one day be past and that He will "long for the work of [His] hands" (v. 15) as he once did. As it is, his sins are "sealed up in a bag" and held against him (v. 17). This refers to the ancient accounting practice of putting stones in a bag representing various outstanding debts which must one day be paid (cf. Hartley, p. 238; Delitzsch, *Job*, p. 233). Considering its close connection with v. 17, the American Standard version gives the best translation of v. 16 as a rhetorical question rather than a statement, "Dost Thou not observe my sin?" rather than, "Thou dost not observe my sin" (NASB). The whole point is that God is observing Job's every move and taking it into account for judgment by making a record of it.

It is very tempting for believers living in the "last days", the new eschaton, to import our confidence in the resurrection and eternal life back into the OT. We should be mindful that the OT saints did not share our understanding of, or confidence in, the resurrection. Sometimes David's statement in 2 Sam. 12: 23 is taken as proof of belief in the resurrection in the OT. It is most accurately interpreted as David's resignation that he will join his dead son in Sheol. David will go to him ***in Sheol***, but his son could not return to him ***from Sheol***, the place from which there is no return. Thus, his statement agrees with Job's conclusion that man cannot return from the dead. We must nevertheless ask ourselves when the turning point in Jewish theology occurred, for it is beyond dispute that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection from the dead (Acts 23: 8). The matter was not resolved among Jewish scholars in Paul's day since the Sadducees did ***not*** believe in the resurrection.

Conclusion of the first cycle of speeches

B. The Second Cycle of Speeches (chps. 15-21)

1. Eliphaz (chp. 15)

This second speech of Eliphaz has two major divisions. The ***first*** division disputes Job's claim to wisdom (vv. 2-16) and the ***second*** instructs Job about the calamity awaiting the wicked (Hartley, p. 242). We can almost see Job rolling his eyes with impatience. Eliphaz's speech is generally warmed-over leftovers from his earlier speech and doesn't say anything new. Job already knows that God punishes the wicked, but the argument is irrelevant to the present case. Without claiming absolute perfection, Job still maintains his innocence from any great sin deserving of his affliction.

Eliphaz reiterates (brings up again) the importance of the cumulative (added together) wisdom of the elders compiled into tradition (vv. 17-18). It has been his experience and the experience of countless fathers in the faith that the wicked man will "get his"—i.e. he will suffer for his sin. This is beyond any reasonable dispute; therefore, since Job is suffering, he must acknowledge that he has done something terribly wrong. Eliphaz will not relinquish his hold on traditional retribution theology just because Job is his friend and has been known in the ***past*** as a righteous and just man. The wicked man either will never become rich, or if his wealth increases, it will not endure (v. 29). Although the wealthy sinner may be arrogant against God because of his wealth (vv. 25-27), his wealth will eventually disappear as grapes dropping off the vine (v. 33). He will then be like the vagrant who wanders about looking for food (v. 23). Eliphaz is obviously poking his finger at Job who was once a very rich man but has lost much, if not all, of

his riches. His plight, therefore, has been that of the wicked man. His past sins have now found him out.

We can see once again that much of what Eliphaz says is true enough. In Ps. 73, the psalmist is troubled by the prosperity of the wicked ***until*** he "came into the sanctuary of God." It was then that he "perceived their end." Eventually, God will "set them [the wicked] in slippery places" and "cast them down to destruction" (vv. 1-19). God will indeed punish the wicked. The question is: ***When*** will He punish the wicked—in this life or in the life to come? We must postpone our consideration of Ps. 73 until later, but according to the OT saints' limited understanding of the afterlife, the psalmist must have been talking about God's punishment of the wicked in this ***present*** life, not beyond the grave. This is nothing less than the theology of Eliphaz, and it is true to a point. We all know examples of wicked people who have accumulated great wealth but have lost their vast empires through various calamitous setbacks. So what is wrong with Eliphaz' assertion? It is mistaken on two counts. First, because it has no relevance to Job's case. Job is not a wicked man—at least not in the same way Eliphaz means. Second, in Job's response to Eliphaz, he will also maintain that often the wicked ***never*** suffer the retribution of God in this life. They live, ***and die***, in their prosperity, never suspecting God's judgment. Our own experience supports this observation. While some of the prosperous wicked lose their fortunes in this life, others die rich and fat, and their admirers speak glowingly of them at their funerals. It is precisely because so many rich unbelievers die with their riches in tact that people are persuaded that the gospel does not "work". It does not ensure the "good life", so what use is it? (cf. Ps. 73: 10-13) Remember that Satan's charge from he very beginning of the book is that Job worships God for what he can get out of Him. If ***all*** of God's people were materially prosperous, and if ***all*** the wicked were poor—no exceptions—people would worship God only for His material benefits in this life. But this is not the Christian faith which loves God for Himself and hopes in the resurrection to a restored heaven and earth.

2. Job (chaps. 16-17)

Job responds first by saying that all his friends are "sorry comforters". If he could trade places with them, he too could ramble on about how God was judging them for ***their*** sin (v. 4)! As it is Job is exhausted from his affliction which stands as a witness against him (vv. 6-8). In light of the entrenched doctrine of retribution, Job's insistence of innocence has little credibility with anyone. All are convinced of his guilt because of the way God is treating him (vv. 8-14). Regardless of the external witness of afflictions against him, Job maintains his innocence and appeals to God as the only infallible witness to his innocence (vv. 17-19). He also believes that the earth itself will cry out as a witness against the spilling of innocent blood (v. 18; cf. Gen. 4: 10; Num. 35: 33; see also Ps. 19: 1—As the creation tells of God's ***glory***, it also witnesses to His ***justice***).

It may seem strange that Job identifies God not only as his persecutor, but also as the only witness to his innocence. Will God serve as a witness against Himself? This dilemma has caused some expositors to identify the witness as an angel and not God, but this opinion is hardly tenable (defendable). It is not the case that he is asking God to testify against Himself, for Job does not believe, as do others, that God is punishing him for his sins. In Hartley's words, "He is not essentially pitting God against God; rather he is affirming genuine confidence in God regardless of the way it ***appears*** that God is treating him. Since Job, in contrast to his friends,

will not concede that truth is identical with appearances, he presses on for the true resolution to his complaint from God himself" (p. 264; emphasis mine). One day God will vindicate him in His eternal court by explaining the real reason for Job's suffering. Job gets close to getting his wish at the end of the story, but not quite; for God does not have to explain His actions to anyone. Although Job never receives God's apology, he is nevertheless vindicated before his friends. Thus at this point, when all have turned against him, Job looks steadfastly to God alone as his only support (Hartley, p. 264).

Once again Job serves as a type of Christ who suffered the reviling of others unjustly. ***The cross was not as it appeared to be***, for God was not punishing Christ for His own sin but for the sins of others; and while punishing Christ for our sins, God was also well-pleased with Christ in every way—as He was with Job in a relative sense—longing for Easter morning when He would exalt His Son by raising Him from the dead, thus vindicating his innocence. In the same way God is longing to vindicate Job at the end of this story and will do so by restoring all his wealth and giving him ten more children. Furthermore, at the very same time Christ was enduring the wrath of God against Him as our penal substitute, He was steadfastly entrusting Himself to the Father knowing that it was only a matter of time when He would be acquitted of all the accusations of the Jews—including blasphemy—and considered Him accursed for being hanged on a tree (Gal. 3: 13b; cf. Deut. 21: 23). "And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

There will be times in our lives when we must do the same thing as Job—look to God alone as our witness. As good and loyal as our friends and associates may be, or as wise as our church leaders may be, they are not omniscient or infallible; and these limitations may lead them to make value judgments and assumptions about us and our actions which may not be valid (correct). This reality should not offer us an excuse or an encouragement to ignore the counsel of others or reject Biblical authority, but a warning not to put unrealistic hope in the judgments of men. At times it may appear that you are pitted against your Christian friends—and even your church—in the confidence of your innocence or your decisions. This is not a time to be proudly defiant, but humbly dependent that God may in His good timing vindicate your innocence in a particular matter—knowing also that you are not innocent in many other matters.

In ***chapter 17***, Job laments the fact that his name has become a byword for God's judgment (v. 6)—"And I am one at whom men spit." The injury is intensified by the fact that it is God who has rendered the hearts of others dull to Job's plight and has blinded their eyes from understanding the truth about his situation (v. 4). Job becomes the type of another innocent man who also endured the mocking of others, "I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and ***spitting***" (Isa. 50: 6). Jesus suffered the ridicule of Jews and Gentiles alike as he was beaten and spit upon at his mock trial and final execution. He is the ultimate expression of the suffering of all of God's innocent people who endure the slander, ridicule, and ill-treatment of the wicked all the while God renders their hearts insensitive, their ears dull and their eyes dim (Isa. 6: 10; cf. Matt. 13: 14-15). This is one of the difficulties of providence. God allows His people to suffer while the wicked mock at them. But in the end this will serve to glorify His name (Phil. 2: 8-11) for His suffering people are a testimony that God is loved in spite of outward circumstances.

3. Bildad (chp. 18)

The reader will notice that the speeches of Job's friends are getting shorter and shorter (cf. Hartley, p. 241). Either they are getting tired or they are giving up hope that Job is listening. In this speech Bildad basically repeats the theme of Eliphaz. He first rebukes Job for his accusation against his friends, "Why are we regarded as beasts, as stupid in your eyes?" (v. 3) He then follows Eliphaz in his severe warnings to the wicked. While there is hope for Job's repentance in his first speech, no such hope is reflected in this one. He no longer entertains any optimism in dialoguing with Job, but simply warns him of the sure judgment of the wicked (Hartley, p. 272). His final word is especially caustic and hurtful, "And this is the place of him who does not know God" (v. 21). Job is apparently no longer considered as a believer who is back-slidden into serious sin, but an entrenched unbeliever, one who does not know God at all.

4. Job (chp. 19)

Job counters Bildad's contention that Job has been trapped by his own net (18: 8; cf. Ps. 35: 8). On the contrary, the net into which he has fallen is a trap laid by God himself (v. 6). And contrary to Satan's contention that God had put a hedge of protection around Job, he feels that God has imprisoned him within walls which he cannot pass (v. 8; cf. 1: 10; Hartley, p. 285). His reputation has been ruined, and the respect he once received from others ("crown") is now gone (v. 9). It is reasonable to assume that Job once enjoyed a respected place in the city gates with the elders. Now he sits on the ash heap, a place of humiliation (Hartley, p. 286).

His intimate friends had abandoned him, as well as the members of his own family, particularly his own brothers (vv. 13-14). Even the hired servants, who in days past responded to his every word, held him in contempt and refused to answer his requests (vv. 15-16). His physical condition was loathsome to others; his own wife was offended by his breath (v. 17); and small children who were trained to respect their elders despised him and ridiculed him as he attempted to stand (v. 18; Hartley, p. 289). It is a sad reality that often when people suffer, they are abandoned by "fair-weather friends", those who only enjoy the company of "winners". In the minds of his family and friends, Job was a cursed man, and anyone associated with a cursed man was himself in danger of being cursed. This explains his isolation from others. What Job needed at the moment was not new speeches and sermons which persecuted him, but quiet pity (v. 21-22).

Prophetically, Job wishes that his words were inscribed in a book or engraved on a monument, for he fears that he will die before his honor is restored (vv. 23-24; Hartley, p. 291). His wish is more abundantly fulfilled than Job could have possibly imagined, for the whole world has read of Job's innocence. More importantly, however, the world has a record of the sovereign prerogative (right) of God in dealing with men.

Job knows that his redeemer lives. The kinsman-redeemer was an important institution in Israel which included the redemption of lost land (Lev. 25: 25), the avenging of blood (Num. 35: 19), raising up the children of a deceased brother (Ruth 2: 20), and the initiation of lawsuits to protect a kinsman's rights and integrity (Prov. 23: 11) (All verses cited by Hartley, p. 292). Job believes that his kinsman-redeemer will initiate a lawsuit to redeem the integrity he has lost through his affliction. The expression, "will take his stand on the earth" is used as a legal expression for standing up as a witness in court (Hartley, p. 294; citing Deut. 19: 15-16). Who is this kinsman-

redeemer? He is the same as the witness in heaven previously identified as God himself (16: 19; see discussion). This kinsman-redeemer is none other than God who will one day acquit Job of all charges and restore his integrity (Hartley, p. 293).

Verses 26-27 raise the urgent question of ***when*** this kinsman-redeemer will vindicate Job as well as whether Job believed in the resurrection from the dead. Hartley presents various interpretations (pp. 295-296).

> (1) God will raise Job from the grave so that he will experience his vindication before his accusers....

This was the favored interpretation of the early church fathers including Clement of Rome and Origen. It was also held by Luther. However, there is little evidence from the text of *Job* that he believed in the resurrection from the dead (cf. 7:9; 10: 21; cited by Hartley, p. 295). Though adopting this view in the past, I now agree with Hartley that this is reading the NT back into the OT. "Since...the idea of resurrection is not treated in any coming passages, it is hard to contend that Job sees it as the answer to his plight" (p. 296).

> (2) From the grave, Job, a bodiless spirit, will witness the occasion when God appears before the local assembly to verify Job's innocence.

This was the opinion of early Jewish interpreters, but it is contrary to Job's own opinion that the dead are not aware of events happening on earth (14: 21; cited by Hartley).

> (3) Jobs thoughts on these verses are conditional: if he should see God [and he may not], he would behold God's vindication of him (words in brackets mine).

Hartley rejects this view in light of the fact that Job positively and confidently affirms that his redeemer will most definitely take his stand in his defense. This confidence is contrasted with the wishful thinking of vv. 23-24.

> (4) God will intervene before Job's death and restore him to his former status.

This view is adopted on the basis of Job's emphatic statement of vv. 26-27: "I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold." The phrase in v. 26b may be translated either "without my flesh" or "from my flesh". The latter translation is probably correct since Job says he will see God with his own eyes (Hartley, p. 297), i.e. his own fleshly eyes, not spiritual eyes. Job believes that before he dies, and while suffering in his afflicted body, he will behold his kinsman redeemer, his witness, appearing on earth to vindicate his innocence. As it turns out, this is precisely what happens, a fact which gives further credibility to this line of interpretation.

> Although Job's confession as interpreted does not explicitly support the doctrine of resurrection, it is built on the same logic that will lead to that doctrine becoming the cornerstone of the NT faith. Job is working with the same logic of redemption that stands as the premise of the NT doctrine of resurrection. Both hold to the dogma that God is just even though he permits unrequited [unpaid] injustices and the suffering of the innocent. God, himself, identified with Job's sufferings in the sufferings of his Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered unto death even though he was innocent. Jesus overcame his ignominious [shameful] death by rising from the grave. In his victory he, as God's Son and mankind's kinsman-redeemer, secured redemption for all who believe on him. While his followers may suffer in this life, he is their Redeemer, their Advocate before the Father. In this way Job's confidence in God as his Redeemer amidst excruciating [very painful] suffering stands as a model for all Christians (Hartley, p. 297; words in brackets mine).

Job concludes in vv. 28-29 with a warning of his own. Unjust accusations merit their own judgments; therefore, his friends should not be surprised to receive God's reproach for misjudging Job.

5. Zophar (chp. 20)

Zophar's second speech follows the same basic outline as the second speeches of Eliphaz and Bildad: (1) a negative response to Job's previous speech (2) an eloquent description of the fate of the wicked. It is evident from Zophar's response to Job that he is unmoved by Job's appeal to his kinsman-redeemer in the previous speech and indirectly dismisses the possibility (Hartley, p. 299). He also feels insulted by Job's warnings of 19: 29 (Hartley, p. 300).

Once again Zophar appeals to the traditional retribution theology: "Do you know this from of old, from the establishment of man on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short and the joy of the godless momentary?" (vv. 4-5). His focus throughout this speech is on the wicked who prosper at the expense of the poor (vv. 10, 15, 18, 19, 22, 28). Implied in all of these verses is that Job is the culprit who has oppressed and forsaken the poor and prospered as the result. But true to Zophar's claims—and in strict accordance to retributive justice—Job's ill-gotten gains have been lost. Thus Zophar is no longer content to "beat around the bush" in his generic (not specific) accusations against Job. He is inclined to believe that one of the specific sins in Job's past is the mistreatment of the poor.

This is Zophar's last speech. Judging from the completely negative tone of the speech, it appears that Zophar has given up any hope of Job's repentance and has nothing more to say to him (Hartley, p. 309).

6. Job (chp. 21)

In this last speech of the second cycle, Job forcefully challenges the dogma of retributive theology. Is it really true, Job asks, that ***all*** the wicked will be repaid in kind for their wickedness in this present world? Are there indeed no exceptions? Job can think of many. With his own eyes he has seen the wicked prosper and never, in this life, have to give an account for their evil deeds. Rather than his sons having to give his ill-gotten gains back to the poor—Zophar's claim in 20: 10—the descendents of the wicked seem to flourish and prosper (vv. 7-8). "Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God on them", a poignant (very painful to the feelings) reminder of the catastrophe which took the lives of Job's own children in their prime (1: 19). While God spares the lives of the wicked's descendents, He chooses instead to kill Job's descendents. It deserves to be repeated here that throughout the entire book of *Job*, his argument is ***never*** with Satan, but only his friends and God—and primarily with God. *Job* would never have been written if the Scriptures allowed a theology of Satan in which Satan had free reign to do as he pleased. If this were the acceptable explanation, then there would be no mystery, only fear, for God would be a helpless "sovereign" (a contradiction in terms) who cannot rescue his children when they are attacked by Satan. (For an example of this lame interpretation of *Job*, see *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Rabbi Harold Kushner in which he presents God as the compassionate, empathetic but helpless bystander in Job's afflictions.) The whole difficulty arises when we realize that God ***permitted*** Satan to attack Job in the first place for no apparent reason.

Job's question in v. 7 is identical to the theme of the entire 73rd Psalm, "Why do the wicked prosper?" This was a painful question lingering the mind of the psalmist and it was equally painful to Job. The truth is: the wicked do prosper in this world and for some of the wicked, their prosperity extends to many generations of their wicked children. Thus experience will teach us that the law of retribution has notable exceptions.

Furthermore, the prosperous wicked see no need whatever to serve the Lord in order to receive His blessings (v. 15)—the "utilitarian arguments" of Job's three friends. Why should they serve God for material benefit when they are already rich? "What would we gain if we entreat Him?" (cf. Hartley, p. 315). Job also challenges the argument that the wicked frequently and speedily receive the penalty of their sins, "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out, or does their calamity fall on them?" (v. 17; also v. 18). Experience will bear witness that the temporal punishment of the wicked on earth is not nearly as frequent or as swift as his friends are eager to maintain.

Job's basic argument is that if wicked men prosper and live long lives, then his own suffering does not prove that he is wicked. A person's prosperity, by itself, doesn't prove anything. Conversely, a person's calamity also does not prove that he is a great sinner since many prosperous people who never suffer great calamity are sinners. If such is true, then Job's friends need to reexamine their faith in the doctrine of retribution (Hartley, pp. 310, 315).

Conclusion of the second cycle of speeches

C. The Third Cycle of Speeches (chps. 22-27)

1. Eliphaz (chp. 22)

In Eliphaz's third speech he becomes more specific in his accusations against Job. As Zophar in his second speech accuses Job of the oppression of the poor, Eliphaz accuses Job of other specific breeches of the law of God: taking pledges from the poor without cause (v. 6) and apathy (lack of concern) toward the hungry, the orphan, and the widow (vv. 7, 9). Such specific accusations leads us to believe that the author is familiar with the Mosaic Law, but this would place the book long after the patriarchal period of Abraham. Or, we may conclude that the Mosaic Law was merely the codification (writing down into a code) of well-known laws communicated by God to Adam and passed down from generation to generation. Abraham was commanded to "walk before [God] and be blameless" (Gen. 17: 1b). He must have known what this required.

Eliphaz accuses Job of thinking like the heathen—presuming that God does not know about his sinfulness (v. 13). From v. 21 to v. 30 he calls Job to repentance, something not found in the last speech of Zophar who has given up on Job. Eliphaz exhorts Job to "lay his gold in the dust" (v. 24)—to forsake the treasures that Job has acquired from ill-gotten gains and his oppression of the poor. If he would do this, God himself will become his gold, his most valuable asset (v. 25). Again, such a statement is true in the proper context. All of us should forsake any trust in money and trust in God as our most valuable treasure. But all his life Job has done just this, and he knows it. In his next speech, Job will challenge Eliphaz' unfounded and unproven accusation that he has desired gold more than God by saying, "I have treasured the words of his mouth more

than my necessary food" (23: 12b). It is categorically (without qualification) untrue that Job loves money more than God, but in order to defend his retribution theology—which he thinks must be categorically applied without qualification or exception to every individual situation—Eliphaz must resort to callous (unfeeling and insensitive) and cruel accusations of Job's actions and his motives.

Eliphaz makes a mistake here that all of us are prone to make and which I have made on too many occasions in the pulpit and in private conversations—exhortation to repentance without all the relevant facts and without sufficient compassion. The least Eliphaz could do is to ***give Job the benefit of the doubt***. How could he know that Job had been oppressive and calloused toward the poor? He was Job's good friend, and before now he had never suspected any lack of integrity or avarice (greed) on Job's part. Why now? The only evidence he had to go on was ***Job's present distress and his cherished theology of retributive justice*** which he applied categorically to every situation. Rather than question his theology, he questions Job's integrity without careful research. He also lacks compassion, a mistake Hartley pinpoints in the following penetrating analysis:

> Eliphaz wants Job to focus on God alone as the source of his wealth and joy. Form such singleness of heart comes great spiritual power. These words regarding repentance are insightful and may be proclaimed as a part of God's word. There is one major caution: a call to repentance loses its power when it is offered from inaccurate perceptions and wrong motivations. As Delitzsch says, ***"Even the holiest and truest words lose their value when they are not uttered at the right time, and the most brilliant sermon that exhorts to penitence remains without effect when it is prompted by pharisaic uncharitableness."*** The truth of this statement may be offset by the strange ways of God's working. Nevertheless, the challenge of this truth needs to be carefully considered by all who extend a message of repentance. It needs to be remembered that ***God wants his followers to call people to repentance out of love purified by intercessory prayer.*** Then they will bring comfort to a troubled heart as they lead a person from guilt to forgiveness. In ministering, one's theology must be elastic [not rigid] enough to be applied to a particular situation, since rigid application of a dogma hinders the dynamic, spontaneous expression of Gods' grace. Correctness of expression too often crowds out the authenticity of experience. But a committed faith, aware of wide variances in individual cases, reaches out to communicate God's love in tolerance. ***Such a vibrant faith, confident about the absolutes of doctrine, still struggles with the difficulties and the inconsistencies that arise in working out these truths in daily life.*** Without denying these contradictions, true faith seeks to overcome them in compassionate service to the suffering.
>
> A study of the movement of Eliphaz' rhetoric in his three speeches reveals ***the tension that exists between what one believes and the course of earthly affairs.*** Unfortunately Eliphaz is unable to hold this tension in balance. His care for Job hardens into condemnation because he feels he has to protect his cherished beliefs from Job's charges. Concern for his beliefs leads him to reprove Job instead of sharing Job's burden. As a result, his rhetoric dampens the dynamic of Job's faith and increases the pain of Job's struggle with undeserved suffering. Let us hope that the example of Eliphaz will awaken us to practice our faith by acting compassionately toward the weak and suffering, not by trying to force them into a set, dogmatic mold that would turn them from God rather than to God (pp. 335-336; definition in brackets and emphasis mine).

2. Job (chps. 23-24)

Job's last response to his friends has two sections: (1) a confession of his confidence that if God would hear his arguments He would exonerate (acquit) him of any accusation leveled against him—chapter 23 (2) a complaint about the injustices of this world which God appears to ignore—chapter 24.

(1) The clearest statement of the first section is found in vv. 4-7. If Job could find God (v. 3), he would argue his case with God, and God would "pay attention to me". If this happened, Job is confident that he would be found innocent, "But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (v. 10). Job acknowledges the omniscience (all-knowingness) of God; therefore, God ***knows*** that Job is a righteous man and has not deserved his suffering. He is now being tested in the furnace of affliction, but when God is through testing Job, he will come out of the furnace like purified gold. As gold is found to be true gold by being tested, Job will be found to be a righteous man by being tested. The verses which follow (vv. 11-12) are "the strongest statements to date about his innocence" (Hartley, p. 338), "My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

Confidence in his innocence is tempered by a realization of God's awesome sovereignty which is not subject to man's scrutiny (Hartley, p. 341), "But He is unique and who can turn Him? And *what* His soul desires, that He does. For He performs what is appointed for me, And many such *decrees* are with Him." In his grief and anguish Job has called upon God to give account of His actions against him, but in his heart of hearts he recognizes that no one can demand that God give an accounting of anything He does. "And what His soul ***desires, that*** He does." Therefore, although Job is confident of his innocence, he is resigned to the fact that God cannot be forced to restore his honor before his death, and this fills him with dread (Hartley, p. 342).

(2) In this second section, ***chapter 24,*** Job laments the injustice in this world which God appears to ignore. This is perhaps the most important part of Job relevant to the ancient question: How can a good God exist when there is so much evil in the world? Job never questions the existence of God, but he does question why a good God permits evil to persist seemingly unhindered in the world of men. If his friends are correct in their insistence that God always blesses the righteous with material benefits and always punishes the wicked, how then do they account for all the injustice in the world?

Several forms of injustice are noted: removing landmarks (v. 2a; i.e. stealing another person's property by altering the property lines—cf. Deut. 19: 14; 27: 17); stealing livestock (v. 2b); stealing the donkeys of orphans (v. 3a)—perhaps those whose fathers owed considerable debts—which they used to make a living; taking widow's oxen as pledges for debts which were also a source of income (3b); callousness toward the needy (v. 4a); oppression of the poor who must then live as "wild donkeys in the wilderness" seeking whatever food they can find (v. 4a-6); even taking fatherless children as slaves to pay for indebtedness (v. 9).

Job then bemoans the difficult life of those burdened down with hard labor which produces little income. The poor who have lost their property through indebtedness must glean from the fields which are already harvested (v. 6; cf. *Ruth*); those who must sleep in the fields have insufficient clothing to keep them warm at night (v. 7); laborers who work all day to bring in the grain are forbidden to eat from it (v. 10b); those who push the heavy millstones to press out the olive oil and those who tread the wine presses are forbidden to partake of the products of their labor (v. 11—"but thirst"). Job summarizes the injustice to the working man in v. 12, "From the city men groan, and the souls of the wounded cry out; yet God does not pay attention to folly." ***From all appearances, God doesn't seem to care about the common man.***

His next grievance pertains to criminal injustice. Just as God doesn't seem concerned to right the wrongs toward the poor, He also seems indifferent to blatant criminals. Murders, thieves, and adulterers never seem to face justice in the courts (vv. 14-17).

Verses 18-25 is a difficult section to interpret since Job appears to be reversing himself. Rather than lamenting the fact that criminals are not punished for their crimes, he seems actually to agree with his friends that the wicked ***are*** punished (vv. 18-19). Some expositors believe that these verses are actually part of another speech from Job's friends, but Hartley chooses to believe that although Job sees exceptions to retributive justice, he is not willing to throw it out altogether (p. 352). Though many escape, surely ***some*** of the wicked will be brought to justice. At the end of his speech, Job challenges anyone to "prove me a liar" (v. 25).

Hartley observes definite progress in this seventh response to Job's friends.

> Job speaks with increasing conviction. His confidence in receiving a just resolution to his complaint from the elusive God has grown, and his lamenting his plight in self-pity has receded into the background. Having been free to lament his distress has clarified his thinking, allowing him to formulate his resolve to meet God on legal grounds. Thus he is determined to persevere, holding on to his claim of innocence, until God answers him.
>
> While Job awaits God's answer, his mind turns to the topsy-turvy [confused] affairs in the world that allow the wicked, given to self-serving, brutal deeds of violence, to oppress the weak and powerless. ***His own sufferings have made him more sensitive to widespread human suffering.*** He longs for God to rectify [correct] matters on earth. While he grieves at social evil, he remains so confident that God does eventually execute justice that he pronounces a series of curses against the wicked. Job's concern for injustice leads hem to challenge the theology of his day, but at the same time, because of his profound faith in God, his lamenting drives him to God for an answer. His is anxious that God curse the wicked, holding them accountable for their evil deeds (Hartley, p. 354; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

It is through personal suffering that we become more sensitive to the suffering of others; otherwise, we are too insulated from it to pay any attention to it. From the privileged advantage of a rich and respected man, Job may never have truly empathized (to feel as another person feels) with the poor and suffering of this world until now, although he commonly appealed to their needs (29: 12-13). The ***experience*** of suffering transports us into the ***community*** of suffering shared with all the saints of God (2 Cor. 1: 4-5).

In like manner, the experience of injustice makes us more sensitive to the injustice inflicted on others. Job suffers the injustice of his friends, and he is made to realize just how much other people suffer injustice from those who are more powerful. He takes a long, hard look at the world around him and asks, "How long, O Lord, will you allow the wicked to prosper in this world? How long will you allow them to escape justice? How long will you allow them to afflict others?" These are questions which all of us are asking, and Job is asking them as a spokesman for God's people. Along with Job, we also are confident that there will be a final reckoning for wickedness and injustice. Although the wicked may escape justice in the present world, they will not be allowed to do so beyond the grave. Armed with the knowledge of the NT, we are better able to understand this final reckoning than Job, but intuitively he knew that God would not allow the wicked to go unpunished forever.

3. Bildad (25: 1-6)

Notice, first of all, how short this speech is. This has caused some interpreters, including Hartley, to conclude that Bildad's speech in chapter 25 is continued in 27: 13-23. This may be true since parts of the text could have been misplaced through scribal error. However, this is not the opinion of all interpreters including Delitzsch, who ignores the problem (*Job,* Vol. 2, p. 72), and Gibson, who acknowledges the difficulty of fitting 27: 7(not 13)-23 with Job's previous speeches since in this section Job appears to reverse his position and revert to that of his friends (Edgar C. S. Gibson, *Job*, pp. 141-142,145). In his conclusion of the question, Gibson contends that there are more problems with attempting to ***reconstruct*** the text (as Hartley does) than in taking the text ***as it comes to us in the Hebrew bible***. Once we begin the task of reconstructing the text to fit our logical analysis, where does this task end? As I see it, chapter 26: 5-14 more easily fits with Bildad's speech than it does with Job's response in 26: 1-3, but by what authority do I reconstruct a text which has come down to us for hundreds of years in the best manuscripts? Thus, we will proceed here with the view that no reconstruction is necessary and that the text is correct in the order we have it.

But the student is advised that even the reconstruction view is not adverse (opposed) to biblical inerrancy. Biblical inerrancy applies only to the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts (the autographa) which were continuously copied through the ages to provide us with our bible. We no longer possess the original autographs, but we are confident that the copies provide us with what may be confidently called the "word of God" (cf. my "Doctrine of Scripture", Vol. 1, Systematic Theology). However, this does not eliminate the possibility of copying errors in which scribes could have misplaced a whole section of text (e.g. chapter 27: 13-23).

Continuing with the text, Bildad basically asks, "How can a man [including you, Job] be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman." (v. 4). How can Job claim to be innocent when ***no*** man is innocent before God. But Bildad's argument, if it proves anything, proves too much. If ***no*** man can be innocent, then ***Bildad*** is not innocent either. And if he is not innocent, why is he not suffering as much as Job? Bildad's argument proves that everyone on earth should be suffering the same fate as Job, for no man is innocent in God's sight—everyone is a "maggot" and a "worm".

4. Job (26: 1-14; 27: 1-23)

In 26: 1-4, Job once again accuses Bildad of being a worthless counselor by using biting sarcasm, "What a help you are to the weak! How you have saved the arm without strength! What counsel you have given to one without wisdom! What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!" In truth, Bildad had done none of these things for Job.

Job acknowledges the greatness of God in vv. 5-14. His fear of God advises him to temper his complaint with praise. He complains that this awesome God "has taken away [his] right" (27: 2a) and "embittered [his] soul" (2b). Nevertheless, no mater what he must endure, he will not be compelled to admit guilt for something he had not done just to satisfy his friends: "Far be it from me that I should declare you [his friends] right" (v. 5). He will not "let go" of his innocence (v. 6).

As mentioned above, it appears that vv. 7-23 (or vv. 13-23) is out of place. Particularly vv. 13-23 is a "sweeping contradiction" (Gibson, p. 145) of Job's previous position that the wicked are

not punished but often prosper throughout life and that there is little justice in the world (chap. 24). It is, therefore, understandable that able commentators like Hartley attribute this portion of chapter 27 to Bildad (and they may be correct). The only other plausible (credible) explanation is that Job is giving a parody (imitation) of the common refrain of his friends concerning the terrible fate of the wicked. So far, this repetitive (repeated often) refrain (a repeated phrase) of retributive justice has been the primary focus of their arguments—i.e. the wicked will always be punished. Job simply repeats what his friends have said as the ***summary of all their counsel***. By doing this, he proves that he has been listening to what they have said in spite of their conviction that he has not listened. But before doing this, Job says, "I will instruct you in the power of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal. Behold, all of you have seen it; ***why then do you act foolishly***?" (vv. 11-12). The words, "Why then do you act foolishly?" do not fit with the following speech in vv. 13-23 ***if Job is simply agreeing*** with the retributive justice they have been preaching. Job cannot accuse his friends of being foolish if the retributive justice of vv. 13-23 operates without exception—something his friends have always maintained.

However, Gibson proposes ("not without much hesitation"; p. 148) that vv. 13-23 is a parenthetical statement between vv. 11-12 and 28: 1-28. In other words, Job says, "I will teach you wisdom (corresponding to vv. 11-12). ***You*** have said that the wicked are always punished (corresponding to his summary of their speeches in vv. 13-23). But true wisdom understands that the wisdom of God cannot be found (28: 1-12). It is hidden from the eyes of all men (28: 21). In Gibson's words,

> ...what Job says to his friends is this: "I will teach you concerning the hand of God ! [another translation of v. 11]—It is simply incomprehensible!"...He quotes a summary of their words, he tells them that man is marvellously [sic] clever [in mining for treasure], but that with all his wisdom he cannot discover the principles that rule in the world, for they are incomprehensible. That is his teaching concerning the "hand of God" (p. 146, words in brackets mine).

IV. The Hymn to Wisdom (chp. 28)

Chapter 28: 1-11 is basically a description of a mining operation (Hartley, pp. 373-378; Gibson, pp. 149-152). Man possesses the technology (even in Job's day) to extract precious minerals from the earth, but his intellect in finding buried treasures does not help him in finding wisdom. "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (v. 12; also vv. 13-14; 20-21). It is equally true that wisdom cannot be purchased (vv. 15-19; Hartley, pp. 378-381; Gibson, pp. 152-154). Though hidden from man, God "understands its way; and He knows its place" (v. 23). Nothing is hidden from God "For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens" (v. 24). Through wisdom God created the world (vv. 25-27; cf. Ps. 104: 24), and since man himself is part of the created world, wisdom cannot be discovered through ***independent*** research or logical analysis, but by fearing the Lord and obeying his commandments (v. 28; cf. Prov. 1: 7; Ps. 111: 10). Why do I exist? What is the purpose of the universe? How can evil exist if a good God is in control of all things? For such ultimate questions, man has no answers. In like manner, Job's friends have no answers to his afflictions, though they presume to have them—the summary of which Job gives in 27: 13-23. The wisdom which explains Job's suffering is hidden to anyone but God.

V. Job Argues for His Innocence (chps. 29-31)

A. Job's Remembrance of a Happier Life (chp. 29)

The meaning of this section is fairly straightforward. Job had experienced better days in the past when he was a wealthy, well-respected elder in the community. He had taken part in the decisions of the city council as a chieftain (vv. 7-9, 21-25); helped the oppressed and needy (vv. 12-16); and opposed the oppressor (v. 17).

I don't think we can accuse Job of pride, for he attributes all his success to God in vv. 1-5. God is mentioned no less than five times in 5 verses. On the other hand, there was presumption in Job's thinking for he says, "Then I thought, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand" (v. 18). Before his affliction set in, he, too, was a proponent of retribution theology. The blessings would flow as long as he was obedient to God's law.

B. Job's Lament (complaint) of His Present Life (chp. 30)

In contrast to his former glory, even younger men of low social and moral status mock him, men who live as wandering vagabonds (drifters who moved from place to place) and thieves who are driven away by the citizens of a village whenever they appear (vv. 1-15).

Job cries to God for help, but it doesn't come. God has become cruel to him (v. 20), for whenever he reaches out for kindness God increases his affliction (vv. 24, 26). But this is not how Job responded to others (v. 25), and Job would at least expect God to act as compassionately toward him as he has done to others in need (v. 26). Is Job slipping back from the progress he seems to have made earlier? (cf. chp. 24 and comments) But this is not unusual, for none of us is able to show steady uphill progress in our understanding of God. For a while we may show improvement only to slip back into despair the following day. Besides this, could we predict how we would respond to God given the same suffering as Job? In verses 27 through 30 Job describes some of his physical suffering, not to mention the emotional and spiritual trauma he is experiencing because of his feeling that God has abandoned him.

C. An Oath of Innocence (chp. 31)

This chapter is Job's strongest statement and most detailed assertion of his innocence. In chapter 22, Eliphaz had accused Job of several infractions of the moral law: taking pledges from the poor without cause (v. 6), callousness to the oppressed and hungry (vv. 7-8), apathy toward widows and orphans (v. 9), etc. Job has waited patiently to answer these accusations with specific details of his innocence. Now he asserts that his behavior toward those less privileged than he has been just the opposite of these accusations. He has been fair and just to his servants and slaves because of his recognition that they, too, are made in the image of God (vv. 13-15). He has cared for the poor, the needy, the orphan and the widow (vv. 16-20) and has never perverted justice in the city gates (v. 21). If all of his claims are not true, then let God judge him by letting his "shoulder fall from the socket and [his] arm be broken off at the elbow" (v. 22). "...Job is so bold that four times he specifies the curse that should befall him if he be guilty (vv. 8, 10, 22, 40)" (Hartley, p. 407). Thus, Job is willing to take the drastic measure of calling down the curses of an oath upon him if he is guilty of the crimes listed—a bold move.

In addition to his care for the needy, Job has also been careful about sexual purity—keeping his eyes to himself rather than gazing lustfully at women (v. 31) and never scheming to commit adultery with his neighbor's wife (vv. 9-12). As a man of wealth and influence, Job could have easily sinned in this area. He is, furthermore, not a lover of money, and he has never been proud of his vast wealth (vv. 24-25). He has never worshipped the sun or other heavenly bodies (vv. 26-28; Hartley, p. 408 for a list of sins denied by Job). He has not rejoiced over the ill fate of his enemies nor cursed them (vv. 29-30). He has been hospitable to the alien and the sojourner by providing lodging within his own home (vv. 31-32). If all of this is not true, let God himself prove him wrong. For his part, he is willing to sign a legal document declaring that he is innocent of all these sins (v. 35). (If we hold to a dating of Job between Abraham and Moses, Job's understanding of the moral law of God is quite sophisticated for his time and reveals knowledge of the universal law of God made known to man from the beginning of time.)

VI. Elihu's Speeches (chps. 32—37)

Job's three friends now cease their striving, for it is obvious to them that Job is hopelessly immersed in his own self-righteousness. Were it not for our privileged insight into the dialogue of the first two chapters, we would possibly be inclined to agree with them. Job, for his part, remains unmoved in his conviction of innocence, as his last speech abundantly demonstrates. We are now introduced to yet another character in the drama, Elihu, who has apparently been standing by silent while listening to Job and his three friends. Out of deference (respect) to age (32: 4, 7), he has not said anything although he is literally bursting at the seams to express his outrage at the whole situation. He is angry with Job for being presumptuous enough to charge God with injustice (33: 13), and he is angry with Job's three friends for their inability to silence Job (32: 12). ***At first glance***, Elihu appears to be the over-confident, arrogant young intellectual who is convinced that the old guys need to sit back, shut up, and yield to his superior wisdom. Although Job and his three friends are older and ***should be*** wiser than he, it has become obvious to him, at least, that such is not the case. Old age does not necessarily increase wisdom (32: 9).

True enough, but only the monologue—for there are no responses to Elihu—will reveal whether Elihu can live up to his claim of superiority. It is quite problematic that after four speeches and six chapters, Elihu does not receive even a short response from Job nor does God even mention Elihu in His final response to Job and his three friends. This silence has caused some expositors to postulate (form a theory) that Elihu's speeches are not part of the original document of Job but were introduced later in order to answer the question which had been ignored throughout the dialogue and is not even answered at the end—Why do the ***righteous*** suffer? (Job's three friends have adamantly maintained that the righteous do ***not*** suffer—at least as Job has suffered. They have answered another question—Why do the ***unrighteous*** suffer?) ***Elihu's answer is that God uses suffering for disciplinary purposes to rescue the righteous man from the error of his way which may lead to ultimate judgment*** (33: 17-18; cf. Gibson, Vol. 2, pp. 175-176; Delitzsch, p. 205).

A. Elihu's First Speech (chapters 32-33)

In spite of what appears to be brazen (bold) confidence, Elihu spends a considerable amount of time and energy giving an apology for his intrusion (interruption) into the controversy. All of chapter 32 and part of chapter 33 (vv. 1-7) is spoken to justify why he should be allowed to

speak. Several times he introduces the fact that he is going to say something (32: 17-18, 20, 33: 1-2), and we are tempted to say, "Okay, Elihu, so get on with it!" Hartley informs us that giving an apology before speaking was a cultural practice in the ancient East (p. 433), but admits that Elihu's "wordiness" may indicate that he is not as sure of himself as he would like everyone to think (p. 435; cf. 36: 4—a bit over the top, don't you think?). (So, don't pick Elihu for your model in preaching. Your congregation may fall asleep before you get around to saying anything.)

Jackson accuses Elihu of a comic "blooper" (error) when he says, "For I am full of words; the spirit [*ruach*—which Jackson interprets as "wind" rather than "human spirit or the Holy "Spirit"] within me constrains me. Behold, my belly is like unvented wine, like new wineskins it is about to burst. Let me speak that I may get relief..." (vv. 18-20a). While both Job and his accusers have used "windy words" as a metaphor for the ***weakness*** of each other's arguments (15: 2; 16: 3), Elihu ***boasts*** about the wind in his belly (David R. Jackson, *Crying Out for Vindication, the Gospel According to Job*, pp. 146-147). Whether this was really intended to be interpreted as a blooper by the author of *Job* or that the original audience was amused with this blooper (as Jackson suggests); is not hinted at in the text. But if their response was humor, or even laughter, it is difficult to explain why Elihu remains undaunted (not discouraged) and undisturbed in the conviction that he is ***the*** man to clean up the theological mess Job and his three friends have made. I agree with Delitzsch that Elihu is presented by the author as a serious counselor contending with Job's three friends (*Job*, Vol. 2; p. 240).

Elihu doesn't really get to the point until 33: 8. There are similarities and differences in Elihu's discourses from the others. While Job's three friends have accused Job of serious, specific wrong-doing which has led to his suffering, Elihu focuses instead on Job's ***accusations against God***. Job's problem is not a misunderstanding of sin, but of God and His use of suffering (Hartley, p. 442). God often uses two methods to discipline his people and preserve them from destruction—***dreams*** (vv. 14-16; cf. Daniel 4) or ***physical suffering*** ("pain on his bed"—vv. 19-22). Thus, Job's suffering has the ***merciful*** purpose of preserving his soul from going astray into serious sin (vv. 17-18; 29-30)—something Elihu has not accused Job of doing ***already*** (Hartley, pp. 442-444). God even provides angelic mediators who plead for the victim's release from suffering whenever the victim responds in the proper way (vv. 23-25). Rather than provoking accusations against God, Job's suffering should provoke fervent prayer and thanksgiving for God's ***restorative discipline*** (discipline which restores a person to righteousness; 33: 26-28).

Elihu then pauses for a moment and invites Job to respond (v. 32). Getting no such response, Elihu continues speaking.

B. Elihu's Second Speech (Chapter 34).

We now come to Elihu's second speech. Elihu strongly refutes Job's claim that God has not dealt with him according to justice (v. 5; cf. vv. 10-11). By accusing God, Job has become arrogant (v. 7) and has joined the company of the wicked (v. 8). God never perverts justice (v. 12), but always gives man what he deserves (v. 11—"according to his work" and "according to his way"). God alone has the right to rule, something no one gave him, and if He wished He could withdraw His life-breath, causing the whole human race to perish (vv. 13-15; Hartley, p. 454). He is impartial in the judgment of kings and princes who are swept away suddenly in

judgment (vv. 18-24). Not for some hidden sin of immorality or callousness to the poor, but for ***irreverence toward God***, Job deserves to be punished (vv. 35-37; Hartley, p. 462).
Elihu's second speech is much harsher in tone than his first, and Hartley believes "his compassion and openness seem to have hardened into a rigid concern to protect God's rule from the challenge of a rebel like Job" (Hartley, p. 462). Perhaps Hartley is correct, and it is possible that we, like Elihu, are often too quick to defend God's honor, as if He needed defending. In so doing, we run the risk of cuting off all communication with the hurting person. When someone in the church is suddenly afflicted with sorrow upon sorrow and cries out angrily, "Lord, why have you done this to me?!", Elihu is the good-intentioned friend who says, "You must never be angry with God. He always does what is right and good." The last part is true enough, as Elihu has insisted; but the person is ***already*** angry, and telling him not to be angry doesn't accomplish much. Furthermore, God knows he is angry. Better to help him deal with his anger in a productive way. God has wisely ordained the story of an angry man—a righteous man at that—to be inscribed within the pages of Holy Writ, the Bible. He has done so for good purpose, for He knows that Job's story would be repeated millions of times in the lives of His "righteous" people who have felt that God has abandoned them. Even His own Son would one day cry out (without anger), "My God, My God, ***why*** have you ***forsaken*** Me?" If we live long enough, all of us are going to feel like Job in varying degrees. We have this inspired account to help us deal with our grief—and our anger.

C. Elihu's Third Speech (Chapter 35)

By his strenuous claims to innocence and his accusation that God has been unjust in His dealings with him, Job has indirectly claimed to be more righteous than God (v. 2). He has also impiously asserted that there is no benefit to being righteous since the righteous and wicked share the same end (v. 3; cf. 9: 22, Hartley, p. 463). By appealing to God as Creator, Elihu argues that there is a great distance between us and God and that He cannot be affected either by our righteousness or unrighteousness (vv. 5-7; cf. 22: 2-3, Gibson, p.192). Thus, our righteousness is not a gift that we can offer God, and He is not obligated to anyone (Hartley, pp. 465-466).

Against Job's lament that God does not hear the cries of the oppressed (24: 1-12), Elihu argues that men cry to God out of desperation and self-pity, but they do not order their cries into humble prayers and submission to His will. That is, they wish for God to deliver them from their troubles, but they really don't seek God—"But no one says, 'Where is my Maker...?'" (v. 10a) For their impure motives and their pride, God is not compelled to answer their cries (vv. 12-13; Hartley, p. 466; Gibson, pp. 192-193). In a similar way, Job speaks impiously (in an ungodly way) and "opens his mouth emptily" (v. 16a).

D. Elihu's Fourth Speech (Chapters 36-37)

In chapter 36, Elihu returns to his ***theme*** that the ***suffering of the righteous is for disciplinary purposes***, to turn the righteous man away from sin and back to God. Against Job's contention that the wicked live and prosper throughout life until death (21: 7), Elihu says that God does not allow the wicked to continue living or to prosper indefinitely (36: 6; Hartley, p. 470). Nor does God forsake the righteous, as Job has argued in chapter 24. Rather, God has set them in high places with kings (v. 7). If righteous men stray into sin, God makes their sin known to them (by

dreams or afflictions; cf. 33: 14-22). Then, if they listen to God's "instruction" and "commands" (v. 10) and serve Him, they will "end their days in prosperity" (v. 11), as Job believed before his affliction (29: 18-20).

Elihu does not believe that God is ***punishing*** Job but is ***disciplining*** Job through afflictions to deliver him from a worse fate. Perhaps Job is about to be ensnared in sin. God sees this and warns Job through his affliction to steer a different course of action and avoid falling into the "pit" (33: 18). If Job listens to what God is teaching him through his suffering, he will avoid further suffering and will be restored (v. 11). If he refuses to listen, he will prove himself to be godless and will perish (vv. 13-14). By wishing to be free of his suffering, Job has "preferred" evil to God's disciplinary affliction (v. 21; Hartley, p. 474).

Thus, Elihu reasserts with confidence the ***positive aspect of the law of retribution*** that Job had once believed but which had been dashed to pieces under an avalanche of suffering—namely, that God will reward righteous living. By doing this, Elihu forms a ***loose, unintended alliance*** with Job's three friends and their retribution theology. Although he refuses their basic premise (assumption) that Job has sinned grievously and deserved his suffering, he still believes in a ***modified form*** of retribution theology. Job is not suffering because of some ***grievous, overt*** (observable) sin, but he is suffering because he is being disciplined for sin in a ***general sort of way***—what Delitzsch calls "hidden moral defects" (p. 308). "Elihu points him to vain-glorying, to carnal security, and in the main to those defects from which the most godly cannot and dare not claim exemption" (p. 309). If Job repents of his accusations against God and recognizes that God is using affliction to discipline him, he will once again flourish in prosperity.

While distancing himself from the false idea that suffering is always the result of blatant, observable sin—the retribution theology of Job's three friends—Elihu, nevertheless, still believes that ***sin and suffering are inseparable*** and that less grievous, hidden sin has incited God to discipline of Job—a modified view. It is therefore difficult to understand why Elihu believes his wisdom to be so far superior to Job's friends. In this respect, it is just more of the same thing slightly modified. The book of Job ***does not teach that sin and suffering are inseparable or that Job is being disciplined.*** From the prologue of the book where we are given "insider" information concerning the whole story, it is clear that Job's suffering has "nothing whatever to do with Job's sin" either overt sin or hidden sin. And in the epilogue (42: 7-17) God reaffirms Job's claim to innocence against his three friends (reference to Elihu is missing). His affliction is not the result of gross sin; but, moreover, his affliction is not for the purpose of chastisement for hidden sins, as Elihu proposes. No such purpose is presented in the prologue of the book. Rather, his suffering is a ***trial which tests his faith in God and love for God, a trial which God knows will conclude with the "glorious testimony" that God's people do not serve him merely for temporal blessings, but for Himself.*** But this purpose is never revealed to Job, and thus, for him, his suffering remains a ***mystery***, the same sort of mystery which millions of believers have experienced and are still experiencing (Delitzsch, p. 307; see pp. 307-308 for an excellent analysis of Elihu's speech). Yet, the mystery of suffering—though still mysterious and troublesome—should no longer be the mystery it was to Job, for the book of *Job* has been written as a partial—though not complete—explanation of suffering. ***God's people suffer for no apparent reason to prove to the watching world that they love God apart from His temporal benefits.***

At the end of the story, Job, indeed, flourishes once again, but not for the reason Elihu proposes—not because Job accepted suffering as discipline for hidden sins. Job flourishes because God wishes to ***vindicate his innocence and to prove that sin and suffering may be separated as cause and affect—i.e. sin is not always the cause of suffering.***

Nor can we agree with Elihu that God's repentant people ***always*** have a happy ending like Job's, because they don't. The blessings we receive from God may not be recognizable in the least by the unbelieving world which may view our temporal ending as a sad and pointless tragedy. There are millions of skeptics (doubters) living today who believe the same about Jesus Christ, the deluded idealist who believed he could save the world by being tortured and dying on a cross. What a sad, meaningless ending to the life of such a promising teacher! What they fail to realize is that He rose again and is exalted at the right hand of God the Father! And all believers who have suffered in countless, unexplanable ways in this life—united to Christ in His suffering and death—will be exalted with Him!

Elihu takes his argument in a different direction from chap. 36: 22 to 37: 24. Having argued that suffering is one means by which God disciplines his people, he then appeals to Job upon the basis of God's ***sovereign immunity***. He has alluded to this earlier without explanation by asking Job, "Would you complain against Him, that He does not give an ***account*** of all His doings?" (33: 13) God is not accountable to man for what he does, for no man is able to tell him what to do (v. 23). Furthermore, the exalted God is far above mankind; He is, therefore, incomprehensible and can be known only so far as He allows Himself to be known (v. 26a). He is also eternal, his years incapable of being numbered (v. 26b).

For the remainder of his speech in chapter 36 and 37, Elihu appeals to Job on the basis of God's sovereignty in ***creation***, particularly His control of the weather. God reveals His sovereign power in thunder, lightning, snow, ice, and scorching south winds either for curse or blessing (vv. 26—37: 13, 17). Merely by changing weather patterns, God is able to alter the behavior patterns of both men and beasts causing them to seek shelter from cold or heat (vv. 7-8, v. 17; "when the land is still" refers to people seeking shelter from the heat in the shade or their tents Hartley, p. 482). As God speaks to man through the noise of thunder, Elihu pleads with Job to listen to God's voice from heaven (v. 14). Does Job understand how God causes thunder and lightning and changes in weather patterns? Does he participate with God in "spreading out the skies? Obviously not; thus, Job should not entertain any hopes of arranging a court case before God, for he would surely lose (v. 19). As Job acknowledged in 28: 28, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom...", Elihu concludes the same by saying, "Therefore men fear Him: He does not regard any who are wise of heart." Elihu thus appears to be appealing to Job on the basis of Job's own words used against his "wise" accusers. Job, therefore, should apply his own sermon to himself.

E. Elihu's Contribution

So then, how helpful is Elihu in sorting out this whole dilemma? Expositors come to different conclusions. Jackson presents Elihu as a young, arrogant fool. The title to his chapter is "But First the Fool: Elihu". His critical summary of Elihu's speeches is as follows:

> At last Elihu falls silent, facing an audience whose expressions have changed dramatically. They are all silent. There is no applause. There is no response from Job or the friends. No one seems to be paying the least attention to Elihu....
>
> Elihu has given us an awesome description of the visible appearance of God. (Other such accounts can be found in Ps. 18, Ezek. 1, and Isa. 6). Now he turns only to see the One he is describing—and the poor young fool is heard of no more. God doesn't even deem him important enough to address directly, nor does he refer to him at the end of the book. Elihu is humbled by his own obvious irrelevance. He is treated like a child, while God speaks to the men (pp. 152-153).

But is this a fair evaluation of Elihu and his speeches? It is admitted that Elihu's lengthy apology at the beginning of his speeches wearies the mind and tries one's patience. It is also admitted that his bombastic (pompous or arrogant) style causes him to lose credibility. However, if we examine carefully the content of his argument, we may have to acknowledge with Delitsch that Elihu must be taken seriously, and not as a pompous young fool.

> But that the poet [the author of Job] is really in earnest in everything he puts into Elihu's mouth, is at once shown by the description, ch. xxxiii. [33]: 13-30, which forms the kernel of the contents of the first speech. This description of the manifold ways of the divine communication to man, upon a contrite attention to which his rescue from destruction depends, belongs to the most comprehensive passages of the Old Testament [i.e. other OT passages support Elihu's argument]; and I know instances of the powerful effect which it can produce in arousing from the sleep of security and awakening penitence. If one, further, casts a glance at the historical introduction of Elihu, ch. xxxii. [32]: 1-5, the poet [author of Job] there gives no indication that he intends in Elihu to bring the odd character of a young poltroon [coward] before us. The motive and aim of his coming forward, as they are there given, are fully authorized. If one considers, further, that the poet makes Job keep silence at the speeches of Elihu, it may also be inferred therefrom that he believes he has put answers into Elihu's mouth by which he must feel himself most deeply smitten; such truths as ch. xxxii. 13-30, drawn from the depths of moral experience, could not have been put forth if Job's silence were intended to be the punishment of contempt....in the idea of the poet, Elihu's speeches are...the positive preparation for Jehovah's appearing. In the idea of the poet, Job is silent because he does not know how to answer Elihu, and therefore feels himself overcome....Therefore Elihu has not spoken to the wind, and it cannot have been the design of the poet to represent the feebleness of theory and rhetoric in contrast with the convincing power which there is in the fact of Jehovah's appearing (*Job*, Vol. 2, pp. 240-242, explanations in brackets mine).

Hartley also presents a more positive view of Elihu's contribution (p. 485; words in brackets mine).

> Elihu's description of a theophany [cf. p. 484] prepares Job to hear Yahweh's words out of the tempest, for in revering God a human being finds true wisdom....He enjoins Job to realize that the proper human response to a display of God's splendor is the fear of God (37: 21-24). Elihu's exhortation thus foreshadows the response Job will have to Yahweh's theophany (42: 1-6)

The critical analysis of Elihu as an arrogant fool was first proposed by Jerome, and from his influence this interpretation spread widely to the Western Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church also has proponents of this view (Delitsch, p. 238). But looking carefully at Elihu's ***arguments***—and not allowing his style to prejudice us against him—we must admit the similarity of his argument with God's own argument in chapters 38—41. Elihu argues that God is sovereign and, therefore, ***not accountable*** to man's examination (33: 13; 36: 23). He also argues that since Job did not participate with God in creating the world and ordering the physical laws of the universe, he is presumptuous [assumes too much] in thinking that he can win an argument with God or instruct God in dealing with His creatures (37: 18-24). This is precisely what God says when He thunders from heaven, "Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will

ask you, and you instruct Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (38: 3-4).

On the other hand—like Job's three friends—Elihu fails to properly interpret the reason for Job's suffering, and interprets it as God's discipline of Job's hidden sins, making sin and suffering inseparable (see discussion above).

VII. Yahweh's Speeches (38: 1—42: 6)

A. Yahweh's First Speech (38: 1—40: 2)

Elihu's speech has prepared us for God's response, for he said that God could speak to us with the voice of thunder (37: 2). God now speaks from the whirlwind and responds to Job. As He speaks, it becomes evident that Job is now getting his wish. He had long wanted to argue his case with God (13: 3), and now he has his chance; but it will not turn out like Job expected. God issues a series of questions designed to help Job clarify his thinking. Job had accused God of injustice by mistreating an innocent man and by allowing the wicked to prosper and the righteous to suffer. God will now see if Job can defend his lawsuit against Him.

What God says is not what we would have expected Him to say, and it will be disappointing to those who are looking for a detailed explanation of Job's suffering—or their own—for ***God doesn't give Job an explanation*** (cf. Gibson, p. 205). We are also confused that God's declaration of sovereignty does not appear to provide any information ***different*** from what Job confessed to believe at the beginning of the story. Job himself has already acknowledged that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and that creation itself is proof of His sovereign power and majesty (Delitzsch, p. 349, citing Job 9: 4-10; 12: 7-25; 26: 5-14; 28: 23-28). Delitzsch continues with this line of questioning,

> If one ponders these passages of Job's speeches, he will not be able to say that the speech of Jehovah, in the exhibition of the creative power and wisdom of God, which is its theme, would make Job conscious of anything which was previously unknown to him; and it is accordingly asked, What, then, is there that is new in the speech of Jehovah by which the great effect is brought about, that Job humbles himself in penitence, and becomes ready for the act of redemption which follows?
>
> It has indeed never occurred to Job to desire to enter into a controversy with God concerning the works of creation; he is far from the delusion of being able to stand such a test....And yet God closely questioned him, and thereby Job comes to the perception of his sin—how comes it to pass? (p. 350).

His conclusion is that although Job knows all these things about the sovereignty of God in creation, "he does not know it rightly" ***because his knowledge has not humbled him***. What is new in God's speech is not the exaltation of God, but the relationship between God's sovereignty in creation and "the mystery of [Job's] affliction, and to his conduct towards God in this affliction...." In other words, if Job cannot answer God's questions about the created world—things with which he is most familiar—then he surely is incapable of understanding the ***far more complex questions*** about why God permits evil and the suffering of the righteous. The former questions about weather patterns and eagles are relatively simple by comparison (Delitsch, pp. 352-353). In comparison to God's wisdom, Job's understanding is like that of a primary school child—who has not yet learned to add and subtract—challenging Einstein on his Theory of Relativity. Or he is like a nursery school child who, while finger-painting, critiques (corrects) Michelangelo's masterpiece on the

ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In other words, Job is way out of his league, and for the first time he realizes it.

> 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....Everywhere the wonders of God's power and wisdom, and in fact of His goodness abounding in power, and His providence abounding in wisdom, infinitely transcend Job's knowledge and capacity. Job cannot answer one of all these questions, but yet he feels to what end they are put to him [i.e. he understands where God is going with His argument]. The God who sets bounds to the sea, who refreshes the desert, who feeds the ravens, who cares for the gazelle in the wilderness and the eagle in its eyrie [nest], is the same God who now causes him seemingly thus unjustly to suffer. But if the former [the God of creation] is worthy of adoration, the latter [the God who causes suffering] will also be so (Delitzsch, pp. 353-354, words in brackets mine).

It should be noted that God never accuses Job of sin, but only of "darkening counsel" or confusing things (38: 2). In this sense He does not side with Job's friends by demanding Job repent of some terrible infraction of His law. Instead, as stated above, ***He exposes Job's ignorance of the universe and the complexity of God's providence in creating, governing, and maintaining the universe. He also exposes Job's sinful pride.*** Job was not around when God "laid the foundation of the earth", "set its measurements", "laid its cornerstone", etc. (vv. 4-5). Job was also not around when God set the boundaries for the sea and set the appointed times for the celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars) (vv. 8-13). And just as God set boundaries for the sea, He also has set certain limitations upon the wicked by setting the sun in the sky, forcing the wicked to do most of their damage in the cover of darkness (v. 13; Hartley, pp. 497, 515). Thus, God responds to Job's accusation that He is indifferent to the evil in this world. He allows evil to exist—for reasons He does not explain—but sets its boundaries as He does the sea.

With one question following another to the end of His speech, God demonstrates to Job that his knowledge of the created universe is very small. And if Job is unable to answer these questions in the affirmative (a yes answer), neither is he able to "instruct" God in how He should rule the world.

Beginning in 38: 39, God turns from the celestial and geophysical creation to the biological creation. The same God who set the boundaries for the sea, sets the sun and moon in the sky, sends rain, snow, and lightning, and governs the stars, also cares for the animal world. The lioness is dependent upon Him to feed her cubs (v. 39) and the raven to feed her chicks (v. 41). God providentially watches over the deer and the mountain goat as they give birth to their young and as the young animals grow and become independent of their mothers (39: 1-5). He gives each animal unique abilities for its survival: the wild donkey it freedom (vv. 5-8), the wild ox its strength (vv. 9-12), the ostrich its speed (vv. 13-18), the horse his might and courage (vv. 19-25), the hawk its agility in flight (v. 26), the eagle its sight (vv. 27-30)**.** ***By such examples God proves that his wisdom, justice, and compassion are built into the universe of created things*** (Hartley, p. 515). God is omnipresent and personal in all of creation. He can be everywhere at all times observing the minute details of everything which happens, even the birth of every animal. ***If God cares for animals, how much more does he care for Job—even though allowing his suffering—and all mankind made in His image?***

Can Job care for all creation? Can he be there when wild animals need him for food or for birthing their young? Did he create them with their unique abilities? Can he be everywhere in

the world at the same time so that he knows how one event effects another event and then another? Can he predict how weather patterns will affect the outcome of battles and the entire history of the world (38: 22-23)? If not, then ***how does Job think he has the right to question God's justice or reprove Him for mistakes in His government of man's affairs?*** (40: 1) Job judges God's performance only by what he sees, but he hasn't seen much. His vantage point is a very limited perspective compared to God's omnipresent, exhaustive knowledge of the universe (cf. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 94). Commenting on 40: 1, Hartley observes,

> According to Yahweh's argument, it is improper for Job to judge his governance of the world based on the appearance of matters on earth. 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 (p. 517).

B. Job's Response (40: 3-5)

Given the chance to respond to God's questions, Job is reduced to few words, fulfilling his original suspicion that given his day in God's court, he would not be able to answer Him (9: 14). But God is not yet through with Job because Job has not withdrawn his grievance that he suffers in his innocence. He has spoken this grievance "once", even "twice" (v. 5), and he "will add no more" to the original complaint, but he does not ***retract*** his complaint. God must continue with His second speech "to persuade Job to submit completely to his lordship". Until Job is willing to withdraw his case, God will continue his cross-examination (questioning) of Job (Hartley, pp. 518-519).

C. Yahweh's Second Speech (40: 6—41: 34)

For a second time, God commands Job to "gird up his loins like a man". This involved stuffing the skirt of one's robe in the belt so that one could be unhindered for running or working (Hartley, p. 492). God will now ask more questions and then wait for Job to "instruct" Him in the proper method of governing the world. If Job continues to insist that God has no right to afflict an innocent man, this implies moral superiority to God and a self-righteous attitude (Hartley, p. 519). This attitude is common among men who often entertain the notion that they could do things better than God. If they were God, children would not die of starvation, evil people would be removed from the earth and crime would cease, there would be no disease, no hunger, and so on. God now invites Job to prove his superiority. He can start by eliminating all those who are proud and wicked (vv. 11-12). If he can do this, then he will prove that God is wrong by not eliminating the proud and wicked, and he can also save himself from the afflictions he now suffers. ***Job's inability to do this proves that he also has no ability to decide what must be done with the proud and wicked.*** Therefore, there must be wisdom is God's delay in judging the wicked, although He will not reveal to us the reason for this delay.

Behemoth and Leviathan

Beginning in v. 15 and continuing until the end of His speech, God uses a different tact to prove his sovereignty in the affairs of men. It is difficult to determine whether God is speaking simply of two ***literal animals***—which most expositors identify as the hippopotamus and the crocodile—or whether He is also using these two beasts metaphorically as two cosmic powers representing

the "cosmic dimensions of Job's afflictions" (Hartley, p. 522). Delitzsch notes that the two beasts are used in the Prophets and the Psalms as "symbols of a worldly power at enmity with the God of redemption and His people" (p. 384; cf. Ps. 104: 26; Isa. 27: 1). Modern creation scientists have postulated (formed theories) that these two beasts were possibly dinosaurs which roamed the earth with men or lived in the sea (not rivers, like crocodiles) for some time before their extinction (against the theory of evolution). Legends of fire-breathing dragons (41: 21) abound in ancient literature, and one wonders whether many of them are based on eye-witness accounts of true dinosaurs. Whether dinosaurs, or hippos and crocodiles, God uses these two beasts to prove one major point: While these beasts pose no problem for God, for Job they present unmanageable obstacles. Job cannot capture the hippo (40: 24) nor can he put a rope in the nose of a crocodile and make him a house pet (41: 2, 5). (It is acknowledged here that both of these animals have been captured in modern times, but only by people who know what they are doing, not by amateurs like Job. This acknowledgement may also be an argument for the dinosaur theory, for there is no documentation of dinosaurs in zoos.)

The argument—from the lesser to the greater—is that just as Job cannot tame Behemoth and Leviathan, he is also quite unable to subdue evil and all the wicked people in this world. If he thinks he can, he is welcome to try (40: 8-14). This does not mean that God can't do it, either, as Rabbi Kushner suggests (*Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, in which he argues that bad things happen because God can't stop them from happening!) God certainly can tame the wicked any time He wishes. But if Job is ***incapable*** of subduing the wicked, this means that he does not have the right to question why God is ***unwilling*** to subdue them according to Job's time-frame. In his infinite wisdom, God has a purpose in delaying His judgment upon the wicked (Prov. 16: 4), a purpose He feels no obligation to make known to Job—or to us. Continuing with this line of thought, God's purposes in allowing evil go hand in hand with His purposes in allowing Job to suffer, and just as Job must trust God's purpose in cosmic (world-wide) evil, he must also trust God's purpose in allowing his suffering—without demanding an explanation.

> Whereas the first speech addresses the issue of God's gracious and just maintenance of the world, the second looks at the cosmic dimensions of Job's plight. ***In the first speech Yahweh emphasized that he put justice in the fabric of the created order. In the second speech Yahweh demonstrates that he has the power to execute his justice.*** In God, power and justice are not at odds as they are in human beings. In him they are complementary qualities that accomplish the ***greatest good for the entire world.*** If Job accepts Yahweh's arguments, he may rest his case with God and trust him to do justice in his case. God's mercy assures him that God will act justly on his behalf, and God's power guarantees him that God is able to achieve what he purposes for Job (Hartley, p. 522; emphasis mine).

Again, the reader of *Job* may be disappointed that God does not give us a point by point explanation of human suffering, the existence of evil, and a host of other thorny problems which prick our intellects. But as Gibson wisely observes,

> ...God's method all through the history of the world has been not to solve them [namely ultimate questions] for man by the direct teaching of revelation, and thus free him from the responsibility of inquiry, but rather to lead him to work out the answers for himself by patient thought and observation of the teachings of nature and history. The purpose of His revelation is to discipline the heart rather than to satisfy the intellect, and this purpose the manifestation here granted to Job completely fulfills (p. 206; words in brackets mine).

D. Job's Response (42: 1-6)

Being the 21st century inhabitants of the modern world, we may have trouble understanding why Job so readily understood God's arguments, especially the second speech about Behemoth and Leviathan. But it is evident from his response that Job had no doubt at all about God's meaning. After the first speech, Job decided that it was time for him to remain silent and listen, but he had not yet repented. After the second speech, however, Job is ready to "repent in dust and ashes" (v. 6). He now recognizes that ***his knowledge and wisdom are much too deficient to question God's governance of the world,*** however enigmatic (confusing) the world is. As a practical example, he may not understand how the prosperity of the wicked and the oppression of the poor and weak manifest the wisdom of God. Job would have wished such things to have been eliminated from human history. But given his inability to comprehend the bigger picture of God's providence—how all events are linked together in the mind of God who declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46: 10)—and the bigger picture of God's glory manifested through man's sin (Prov. 16: 4), he is willing to concede that God's purposes in all events will be brought to pass by God's power. The suffering of the innocent is ***not inconsistent*** with divine wisdom (Hartley, p. 535). Job had long believed the ancient wisdom of God's sovereignty in creation and His mighty power (v. 5; "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear"), but now by personal experience Job is beginning to understand God's wisdom and power correctly (v. 5b), for now this knowledge has led to humility. "In taking this path Job confirms that humility is essential for a vital relationship with God" (Hartley, p. 536).

VIII. The Epilogue (42: 7-17)

A. Judgment on Job's Friends (42: 7-9)

Good intentions are not enough to insure proper obedience. ***What*** we do is just as important as ***why*** we do it. Job's three friends had good intentions of defending God against Job's accusations and delivering Job from sin at the same time, but succeeded in nothing. Notice that God does not accuse them of mistreating Job, although they did, but of failing to speak the truth about Himself (v. 7). Job, on the other hand, had spoken "what is right". This declaration seems confusing in light of the fact that Job had accused God of injustice toward him in particular and of injustice in ruling the world in general. How then, can God say that Job had spoken what is right about Him?

The answer lies in the fact that God is isolating the main issue from the peripheral (less essential) issues. It is true that Job sinned in his attitude toward God. He had accused God of injustice and inconsistency in ruling the world and subduing evil, and he had become prideful in his insistence of his innocence in the face of God's ill treatment of him. This was a serious offense for which he repented at the end of God's second speech. On the other hand, Job's friends had fallen into the error of ***retribution theology*** which Satan had championed at the beginning of the story. Satan's theory was that Job would not serve God unless he continued receiving His material benefits. His faith was therefore a mercenary faith bought and paid for by God's temporal goodness to him. If that temporal goodness were removed, Job would abandon his faith in God. Job's friends had allied themselves with Satan by encouraging Job to repent of some great sin he never committed in order to be restored to God's temporal benefits. Job would have had to lie against the truth in order to do this, because he knew he was innocent of any great sin which would have been the occasion of his judgment. ***Therefore, Job was willing to forego personal material restoration in order to find the truth about God.*** But rather than giving Job the benefit

of the doubt and struggling with him to find the truth, the three friends had sought to defend God's honor, or ***more precisely, they had sought to defend the honor of their limited understanding of God enshrined in their theological tradition of retribution theology.*** God was in the box of their traditional theology—what wise men down through the ages had always believed and taught—and they would not let God out of that box.

In essence they believed that ***God could be forced to act in a certain, predictable way***. If you were good, God was obligated to be good to you within this life-time. If you were bad, God was obligated to judge you in this life. God was their genie (a magical servant) in the bottle whose actions were ***preordained or determined*** according to man's actions, and He was ***not allowed*** to act in ways contrary to ***human prediction***. Therefore, despite their assertions of God's sovereignty throughout their speeches, ***they denied this sovereignty in their assumptions of God's obligation to always act in predictable ways*** (for further explanation, see John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 172-174).

God's disapproval of their error is a warning to all aspiring theologians and preachers, that however convinced we may be of our theological traditions, individual circumstances like Job's should never be swept under the rug or hidden in a corner for the sole purpose of avoiding confusion and defending our theology. We should, therefore, avoid constructing rigid paradigms or models from which every situation must be interpreted. Life is confusing, and personal experiences—our own and others'—***force us to reevaluate our theology to make sure that it reflects the reality of God and human experience, or whether it is merely an artificial reconstruction of reality.*** This is not an admission that we derive our theology from human experience. God forbid! Our theology should guide our interpretation of human experience. Nevertheless, God has given us a whole Bible of ***human experience*** in which His true nature and His ways with men demonstrate the theology of the Bible in tangible ways. But even with the Bible in hand, we cannot assume that we have everything all figured out. New situations will emerge to challenge our confidence in what we ***think*** we know.

It is interesting that Elihu is not mentioned for judgment. Some interpreters would explain this on the basis of the Elihu speeches being a later addition to the book of *Job*. I would prefer to believe that Elihu is not mentioned because he did not err as grievously as Job's three friends. Although he failed to correctly interpret Job's situation, he did not assume without proof that Job was suffering for his sin. What he said about God's use of affliction as chastisement for hidden sins was true, although irrelevant in Job's case, while the retribution theology of the other three was false. It could also be, as Delitzsch believes, that Elihu's speech had somewhat softened Job and prepared him for further instruction (pp. 308-309).

B. Yahweh's Blessing on Job (42: 10-17)

In the end, God blesses Job twofold for all the material blessings He had stripped from Job. He also gives him ten more children, seven sons and three daughters, to replace the children he lost—possibly by a new wife, since the first one had possibly abandoned Job (but this is pure speculation). However, she is not mentioned past the second chapter or in the epilogue. His brothers and sisters who had abandoned him in his suffering (19: 13, 17) now return to him and console him for all his afflictions. Delitzsch dryly comments, "Now they all come and rejoice at Job's prosperity...in order to bask therein....And now their tongues, that were halting [silent] thus

far, are all at once become eloquent: they mingle congratulations and comfort with their expressions of sorrow at his past misfortune. ***It is now an easy matter that no longer demands their faith***" (p. 389; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

As mentioned earlier, Job's happy ending is not a blanket promise for all believers who go through severe trial in this life, and we should not be disillusioned when we see believers—and possibly ourselves—ending life in seeming defeat. This is not the gospel. Job's life ends in ostensible (externally observable) victory as a vindication of his integrity, the final defeat of retribution theology, and a testimony to the truth of God's nature. Typologically, his victory at the end is not his own, but the victory of Christ, the suffering servant who suffered not for His own sin but for the sins of the world and rose again from the grave as a vindication of His innocence. Lastly, it is a victory and vindication for all believers who will die—possibly without any temporal vindication—but who will rise again to a life infinitely better than the life they lived on earth. As Delitzsch wisely observes, "...the final teaching [of the book] is, that sufferings are for the righteous man the way to glory, and that his faith is the way to sight" (p. 385).

Appendix to Job: The Problem of Moral Evil in a World Created and Governed by an All-Powerful and All-Good God

The existence of evil in a world created by a God who is good has always been a perplexing problem. The problem cannot be solved, as some attempt to solve it, by merely balancing the amount of good in the world against the amount of evil and seeing whether there is more good than evil. Any amount of evil in the world is still an enigma if certain things about God are believed: not only that God is good, but that he is also all-powerful. The logical argument, similar to one presented to philosophy class by my atheist professor over 40 years ago, is this (Frame, *DG*, p. 160):

1. If God is omnipotent [all-powerful], he is able to prevent evil.
2. If God is good, he wants to prevent evil.
3. But evil exists.

Conclusion: either God is not omnipotent, or he is not good.

My college philosophy professor extended the argument by using the conclusion as the fourth premise.

4. Either God is not omnipotent, or he is not good.
5. But God's existence requires that he be all-powerful and all-good.

Conclusion: God does not exist—at least the Christian idea of God.

A variation of this argument incorporates God's omniscience (Nash, p. 94, emphasis mine):

1. If God is good and loves all human beings, it is reasonable to believe that he **wants** to deliver the creatures he loves from evil and suffering.
2. If God is all-knowing, it is reasonable to believe that he **knows** how to deliver his creatures from evil and suffering.

3. If God is all-powerful, it is reasonable to believe that he is **able** to deliver his creatures from evil and suffering.

Either God does not want to eliminate evil, does not know how to eliminate evil, or doesn't have the power to eliminate evil. Evil exists in the world; therefore, it does not seem likely that God exists. Therefore, we might fill out the argument:

4. Evil and suffering exist.
Conclusion: God must not be all-loving, all-knowing, or all-powerful. Therefore, the God of the Bible does not exist.

But it is argued by many Christian philosophers that there is nothing in any of the premises of these syllogisms which demands the conclusion that the Christian God does not exist. It is not inherently contradictory to say that God is all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful, and that evil exists in the world.

But we may also challenge the first premise: "1. If God is good and loves all human beings, it is reasonable to believe that he **wants** to deliver the creatures he loves from evil and suffering." We know in fact that God **did not want** to deliver Job from evil and suffering, at least not immediately. He did not wish to deliver Jesus from evil and suffering until the work of redemption was accomplished. Moreover, he has not wished to deliver believers from evil and suffering since the fall of man, and he does not wish to deliver them from evil and suffering today, at least not immediately.

However, he does have an eternal plan to deliver them from all evil and suffering. It's called by many names:

- "kingdom of heaven" (throughout Matthew's gospel)
- "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65: 17; Rev. 21: 1; cf. Matt. 5: 5)
- "restoration of all things" (Acts 3: 21)
- "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8:18)
- "the creation…set free" (Rom. 8: 21)
- "new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21: 2); etc.

But for the time being, evil and suffering have an important place in God's plan. Frame enumerates some of the reasons for evil and suffering in this world. "God uses evil," he says,

> to test his servants (Job; 1 Peter 1: 7; James 1: 3), to discipline them (Heb. 12: 7-11), to preserve their lives (Gen. 50: 20), to teach them patience and perseverance (James 1: 3-4), to redirect their attention to what is most important (Ps. 37), to enable them to comfort others (2 Cor. 1: 3-7), to enable them to bear powerful witness to the truth (Acts 7), to give them greater joy when suffering is replaced by glory (1 Pet. 4: 13), to judge the wicked, both in history (Deut. 28: 15-68) and in the life to come (Matt. 27: 41-46), to bring reward to persecuted believers (Matt. 5: 10-12), and to display the work of God (John 9: 3; cf. Ex. 9: 16; Rom. 9: 17).

For unbelievers, God sometimes uses evil and suffering **to bring them to repentance** (the pagan sailors in Jonah 1: 5-16; Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4: 33-37; note: there is nothing negative said

about Nebuchadnezzar after this event; Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9; me, after being jilted by my college girlfriend in 1971). I believe **"natural" disasters** (ordained and caused by God) also occur partly for this reason. They are **temporary warnings** of a much greater judgment to come, even greater than the global flood in the days of Noah. Some who survive localized disasters repent and believe. Jesus used the flood as a warning of the coming judgment.

> "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. [38] "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, [39] and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matthew 24:37-39 NASB)

Very often, the devastating conditions of natural disasters and war put people into a state of mind more open to the gospel. This has been seen in Indonesia after the Tsunami in 2004 when Christian relief agencies poured into the country with food, water, and medical treatment. The same thing happened after the tsunami in Japan in 2011. MTW missionaries who had been living in Japan many years said they had seen much more openness to the gospel after this event.

On a cosmic scale, God uses evil as the **"grand demonstration"** of his wrath and power upon "vessels of wrath" (unbelievers) contrasted with the **grand demonstration** of mercy and grace upon "vessels of mercy", also known as "the riches of his glory" (Rom. 9: 22-23; cf. Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration*). Would Christians understand grace apart from judgment?
We have already seen some **morally good reasons** for God to allow evil in the world. To take a closer look, God had a perfectly moral reason for putting Abraham through the agony of almost sacrificing Isaac on the altar (Gen. 22). He was giving Abraham a picture of what he would do two thousand years later in sending his son as a substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. He also had a morally good reason for allowing Job's affliction.

> In each case God had a **perfectly good reason** for the human misery involved. It was a mark or achievement of faith for them not to waver in their conviction of God's goodness, despite not being able to see or understand why He was doing to them what He did. Indeed, even in the case of the greatest crime in all of history—the crucifixion of the Lord of glory—the Christian professes that God's goodness was not inconsistent with what the hands of lawless men performed. Was the killing of Christ evil? Surely. Did God have a **morally sufficient reason** for it? Just as surely. With Abraham we declare, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). And this goodness of God is beyond challenge: "Let God be true, though all men are liars" (Rom. 3:4) (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 171-172, emphasis mine).

Behind the scenes, Satan accuses Job of loving God only for the material benefits he receives (Job 1: 10-11); but although disillusioned at God's severe providence, Job never relinquishes his faith in God, even when encouraged to do so by his wife (Job 2: 9-10). Insisting from the beginning that Job is a righteous man, God wins his "bet" with Satan—although an **omniscient** God never takes any risks—who is not heard from again after the second chapter. Meanwhile, God also maintains his sovereign prerogative to use Job's suffering to prove that **genuine believers worship him for who he is and for his eternal promises**, not for the material benefits they receive in this life.

[Note: It is not accurate to say that Christians would love God and serve him if he did **not** promise eternal life. Paul does not present the Christian hope in this way: "If we have hoped in Christ **in**

this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19 NASB). "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? **If the dead are not raised**, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE" (1 Corinthians 15:32 NASB).]

God can allow suffering for the purpose of glorifying himself because he is God. Although God never does anything contradictory to his nature or moral will, this does not put God on the same playing field as human beings. This is what we call the **Creator-creature distinction**. He is the potter and we are the clay (Rom. 9: 21; Jer. 18: 3-10). As Creator, he has the right to do with his creatures as he pleases within the limits of his own perfections. Speaking of Pharaoh and Esau, Paul anticipates the objection that God is unfair in dealing with his creatures.

> So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. [19] You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" [20] On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? [21] Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9:18-21 NASB)

Therefore, the so-called problem of moral evil is solved by adding a fourth premise to the argument (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 171-172):

1. GOD IS ALL-GOOD.
2. GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL.
3. EVIL EXISTS.
4. GOD HAS A MORALLY SUFFICIENT REASON FOR THE EVIL WHICH EXISTS.

A Problem for the Unbeliever, not the Believer

The Problem of Moral Evil in a World Created by a Good God is really **more of a problem for the unbeliever than the believer**. Just as the unbelieving naturalist cannot account for the existence of universals, the uniformity of nature, or the reality of the external universe he perceives with his eyes, he also cannot account for morality. This is because his epistemology and metaphysics **cannot account for such a distinction between good or evil.** To use Frame's illustration again, if a thief comes into a bank and robs it at gunpoint, who can say that he has done wrong merely on the basis of observation? Can we see goodness or badness oozing out of this situation like a cloud of smoke?

> Unless God's standards govern our concept of goodness, **there can be no talk of good or evil at all.** If there is no personal Absolute, values must be based on impersonal things and forces, like **matter, motion, time, and chance**. But values cannot be based on any of these. They arise only in a context of personal relationships, and absolute standards presuppose an absolute person. Thus, the Christian can turn the tables on the unbeliever who raises the problem of evil: **the non-Christian has a "problem of good."** Without God, there is neither good nor evil" (*DG*, p. 171, emphasis mine).

To quote Dostoevsky again, "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." (I think. I've seen his statement quoted half a dozen different ways.)

Likewise, in **monistic religions** like Hinduism, Buddhism, or western variations of eastern mysticism (the new-age movement), everyone and everything is god. There is no Creator-creature distinction in monism; and if everything is one, there can be no ethical distinction between good and evil. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of Cambodia who murdered thousands and ordered pregnant women disemboweled, is god (cf. *Reader's Digest*, "The Red-Blood Trail of Ho Chi Minh", month and year unknown). The student can see why we have not spent any time with philosophical monism. It is patently absurd, and were it not for a few celebrities like Tom Cruise and Shirley Maclain, it would not receive so much attention in American culture (my opinion). As Kenneth Gentry says in a footnote to one of Bahnsen's lectures, if a monist asks you in a very solemn monotone voice: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" just reach across the table and slap him. (But don't really do that. Try to love him and explain the absurdity of his belief.)

But the problem unbelievers have with evil in the world is usually **psychological** rather than philosophical (Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, pp. 172-174). People go through a great deal of personal suffering and misery in their own lives, and they suffer vicariously through the suffering of their loved ones—like one father in Indiana I spoke with who said he could not believe in a God who would let his son suffer and die from congenital heart disease. This belief was confirmed for him when he visited his son's hospital that was crowded with diseased children just like his son. Suffering Job demanded an explanation for his affliction for 35 chapters (chapters 3 through 37) until God showed up in chapter 38. But God didn't show up to explain or defend himself. He simply declared that he was God and that he created the world, including Job who would not be able to understand an explanation even if God gave him one. End of argument. But somehow, Job understood what appears to be God's "non-explanation", for he said, "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth" (Job 40:4 NASB). After God's second speech, Job says,

> "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. [3] 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' **"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."** (Job 42:2-3 NASB)

And this is the proper response. To accuse God of evil or to demand him to defend his actions is to make declarations about things **we don't understand**, things "too wonderful" (that is, too full-of- wonder) for us. Rather, we should embrace the mystery of God's dealings with us and the world, and bow before his sovereignty.

But rather than humbling themselves before God, people would rather accuse God of what they would call an **obvious violation of goodness**—even though without God they cannot account for good or evil. **Goodness, of course, is what the unbeliever calls goodness** on the basis of his autonomous human reasoning independent of God's word. Therefore, unbelievers wish to trade places with God who must now answer their questions about his behavior. This is essentially a **repetition of primeval history** when Adam and Eve were put in the position of determining whether they should refrain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or eat it. God said one thing; Satan said another. The ball was in their court to independently decide for themselves what to do. Was God **really** looking out for their best interests, or was he holding out on them? Could he be trusted to tell them the truth? Maybe God was the Devil, and the Devil was God. Thus, whenever a believer or an unbeliever takes God to court—a law-court, that is—to

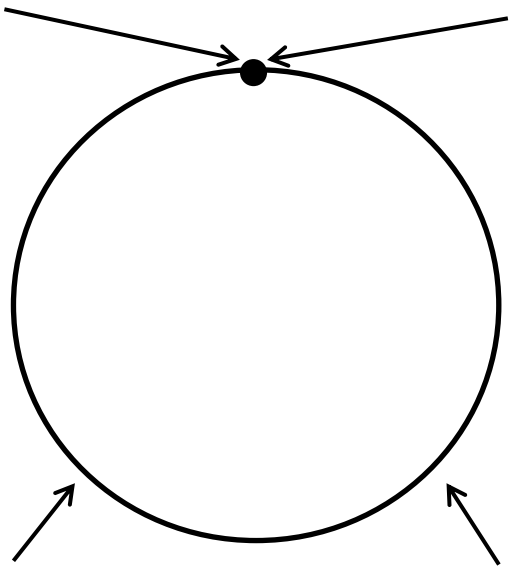
determine whether God had the prerogative to do this or that and to demand an explanation of why he did it, **he is thinking like Adam and Eve.** And we know how that turned out!

> So then, the Bible calls upon us **to trust that God has a morally sufficient reason** for the evil which can be found in this world, **but it does not tell us what that sufficient reason is.** The believer often struggles with this situation, walking by faith rather than by sight. The unbeliever, however, finds the situation intolerable for his pride, feelings, or rationality. He refuses to trust God. He will not believe that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists, unless the unbeliever is given that reason for his own examination and assessment. **To put it briefly, the unbeliever will not trust God unless God subordinates Himself to the intellectual authority and moral evaluation of the unbeliever**—unless God consents to trade places with the sinner. The problem of evil comes down to the question of whether a person should have faith in God and His word or rather place faith in his own human thinking and values. **It finally becomes a question of ultimate authority within a person's life.** And in that sense, the way in which unbelievers struggle with the problem of evil is but **a continuing testimony to the way in which evil entered human history in the first place** (*Always Ready*, pp. 173-174).

In other words, we repeat the sin of Adam and Eve every time we question God's goodness in the face of evil and suffering. As finite human beings—like Job—who are we to question what God is doing? We can barely plan two days activity in a row, nor can we determine the consequences of that activity the day after. Much less can we declare the end of human history from the beginning.

Essentially the unbeliever reasons in a limited circle starting from his **lack of faith** in God's word and reasoning back to where he started, **lack of faith** in God's word. This autonomy is illustrated in the following diagram.

Ending point: Rejection of the biblical explanation for evil. Lack of faith in God's word and trust in the authority of autonomous human reasoning



Starting point: Evil is incompatible with the goodness and power of God. Lack of faith in God's word and trust in the authority of autonomous human reasoning

Biblical explanation found outside the limited circle of man's reasoning: God has a morally sufficient reason for all the evil in this world, but he does not tell us what this reason is.

The believer, on the other hand, should not be intimidated or embarrassed that he cannot explain why an all-good and all-powerful God permits evil in the world. All this proves is that believers don't know everything. "But," as Nash says, "that is hardly surprising news" (*Worldviews in Conflict*, p. 99).