

Notes on Job

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Introduction

TITLE

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

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

DATE

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

Internal evidence suggests that Job lived in the patriarchal period. The length of his life (he lived 140 years after his trials ended, 42:16) is similar to that of Terah (205 years), Abraham (175 years), Isaac (180 years), and Jacob (147 years). The writer measured Job's wealth in terms of his livestock. This is how Moses evaluated the wealth of Abraham and Jacob (1:3; 42:12; cf. Gen. 12:16; 13:2; 30:43; 32:5). The Sabeans and Chaldeans (1:15, 17) were nomads during the patriarchal period but not later. Job was the priest of his family (1:5), a condition that became less common when nations in the Near East developed more organization. Names of people and places in the book were also common in the patriarchal age (e.g., Sheba, Tima, Eliphaz, Uz, Job). Genesis, the Mari documents, and the Egyptian Execration texts, all of which refer to life in the Near East at this time, also refer to these names.

"The idea that Job has an Edomite background is as old as the LXX, which equates Job with Jobab, king of Edom (Gn. 36:33)."¹

"Most recent [liberal] writers are agreed that in its original form the book was of post-exilic origin, and the secondary parts of later composition."²

¹Francis I. Andersen, *Job*, p. 58.

²H. H. Rowley, *Job*, p. 21.

Internal evidence, however, has led many careful students of the book to conclude that it was the work of one person. Perhaps someone else added a few minor touches later under divine inspiration (e.g., 42:16-17). If Job lived in the patriarchal period, as the evidence seems to suggest, what clues are there that someone did not write it then or very soon afterwards? The detailed recounting of the conversations that took place certainly suggests a composition date fairly close to that of the actual events. That has been the position of Jewish and Christian scholars until destructive criticism became popular in the last few centuries. Critics point to the fact that oral tradition was very exact in the ancient world and that people could have transmitted Job's story by mouth for generations and retained its purity. With the Holy Spirit's superintending work it could have been, but there is no evidence that this is what happened. Literacy was widespread in the ancient world at this time.³ Critics further point out that in the process of social evolution composition of a work such as this book was more typical at a date much later than the patriarchal period. Yet again there is no evidence that someone wrote it later. The simpler explanation is that someone wrote it early. Since there is no proof that someone wrote it later, most conservative scholars have continued to prefer the traditional early date of composition theory.

WRITER

The book does not identify its writer. Furthermore the ancient Hebrews could not agree on who wrote it. Consequently many different scholars have made guesses as to who the writer was.

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

Jewish tradition favored Moses as the writer.⁴ Moses recorded other events during the patriarchal period in Genesis, he was familiar with desert life, and he had the ability to write such a book as this one.

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

Other scholars have suggested later writers including Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Ezra.

Of course, the writer may have been none of these individuals. No one knows for sure who wrote Job. I tend to prefer a contemporary of Job or Job himself because of the antiquity of this view and the fact that no one has proved it unsatisfactory.

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

⁴Baba Bathra 14a (in the Babylonian Talmud).

PURPOSE

God inspired this book to reveal answers to questions that arise from God's nature and His ways among human beings. Specifically, what is the basis on which God deals with people?

"How can a God who elsewhere in Scripture is described as the very essence of love and grace initiate or even allow suffering in the lives of His saints? How can His attributes be reconciled with His actions, especially when those actions appear to run counter to all He claims to be?"⁵

SCOPE

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

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

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

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

GENRE

Job is primarily a combination of at least three literary types: lawsuit,⁶ lament,⁷ and controversy dialogue.⁸ The larger category that includes all three is wisdom literature.

⁵Eugene H. Merrill, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 376.

⁶See Sylvia H. Scholnick, "Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975).

⁷See Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*, pp. 1-15.

⁸See James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom," in *Old Testament Form Criticism*, pp. 228, 254. Gregory W. Parsons, "Literary Features of the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):213-29, argued for all three.

"Within the canon of Old Testament Scripture, the distinctive contribution of the Wisdom books is that they expound the relevance of the foundational covenant revelation through Moses to the great issues of man's life in this world, more specifically, of man's life apart from the peculiarly theocratic context of Israelite history."⁹

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

"The book of Job defies all efforts to establish its literary genre. While it has been viewed as an epic,¹⁰ a tragedy,¹¹ and a parable,¹² upon close analysis it is none of these even though it exhibits properties belonging to each of them. As Robert Gordis observes, the author of Job has created his own literary genre.¹³ The book is didactic in the sense that the author seeks to teach religious truth, a task which he executes primarily by means of lyrical poetry expressive of deep emotions."¹⁴

"The book of Job is an astonishing mixture of almost every kind of literature to be found in the Old Testament. Many individual pieces can be isolated and identified as proverbs, riddles, hymns, laments, curses, lyrical nature poems."¹⁵

"One should think of this aspect of interpretation [i.e., genre] as being like the Olympics, a grand occasion made up of a variety of sports. Though it is all sport, each game is played by its own rules and has its own expectations about how to play the game. The variety of literature is the same way. It all has a message, but it conveys that message in a variety of ways and with a variety of expectations. To try to play basketball with soccer's rules will never work, though both use a ball and require foot speed. Or think of musical instruments, they all make music, but in different ways with different sounds. One cannot play the violin like a piano or drums; nor should one expect a violin to sound like either a piano or the kettle drum! In the same way, to read the poetry of the Psalms like a historical book is to miss the emotional and pictorial impact of the message, though both genres convey reality about people's experience with God."¹⁶

⁹Meredith G. Kline, "Job," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 459.

¹⁰Nahum M. Sarna, "Epic Substratum in the Prose of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957):13-25.

¹¹Horace M. Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy*, pp. 3-38.

¹²Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, p. 486.

¹³Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, p. 7.

¹⁴C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, p. 69. See Daniel J. Estes, "The Hermeneutics of Biblical Lyric Poetry," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995):413-30.

¹⁵Andersen, p. 33.

¹⁶Darrell L. Bock, "Interpreting the Bible—How Texts Speak to Us," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 85-86.

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue chs. 1—2
 - A. Job's character 1:1-5
 - B. Job's calamities 1:6—2:10
 - 1. The first test 1:6-22
 - 2. The second test 2:1-10
 - C. Job's comforters 2:11-13
- II. The dialogue concerning the basis of the divine-human relationship 3:1— 42:6
 - A. Job's personal lament ch. 3
 - 1. The wish that he had not been born 3:1-10
 - 2. The wish that he had died at birth 3:11-19
 - 3. The wish that he could die then 3:20-26
 - B. The first cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 4—14
 - 1. Eliphaz's first speech chs. 4—5
 - 2. Job's first reply to Eliphaz chs. 6—7
 - 3. Bildad's first speech ch. 8
 - 4. Job's first reply to Bildad chs. 9—10
 - 5. Zophar's first speech ch. 11
 - 6. Job's first reply to Zophar chs. 12—14
 - C. The second cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 15—21
 - 1. Eliphaz's second speech ch. 15
 - 2. Job's second reply to Eliphaz chs. 16—17
 - 3. Bildad's second speech ch. 18
 - 4. Job's second reply to Bildad ch. 19
 - 5. Zophar's second speech ch. 20
 - 6. Job's second reply to Zophar ch. 21
 - D. The third cycle of speeches between Job and his three friends chs. 22—27
 - 1. Eliphaz's third speech ch. 22
 - 2. Job's third reply to Eliphaz chs. 23—24
 - 3. Bildad's third speech ch. 25
 - 4. Job's third reply to Bildad chs. 26—27
 - E. Job's concluding soliloquies chs. 28—31
 - 1. Job's discourse on God's wisdom ch. 28
 - 2. Job's defense of his innocence chs. 29—31

- F. Elihu's speeches chs. 32—37
 - 1. The introduction of Elihu 32:1-5
 - 2. Elihu's first speech 32:6—33:33
 - 3. Elihu's second speech ch. 34
 - 4. Elihu's third speech ch. 35
 - 5. Elihu's fourth speech chs. 36—37
 - G. The cycle of speeches between Job and God 38:1—42:6
 - 1. God's first speech 38:1—40:2
 - 2. Job's first reply to God 40:3-5
 - 3. God's second speech 40:6—41:34
 - 4. Job's second reply to God 42:1-6
- III. Epilogue 42:7-17
- A. Job's friends 42:7-9
 - B. Job's fortune 42:10-17

A STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF JOB ¹⁷						
Prologue	Job's opening lament	Dialogue-dispute(3 cycles)	Interlude on Wisdom	Monologues (3 cycles)	Job's closing contribution	Epilogue
Chs. 1–2	Ch. 3	Chs. 4–14 Chs. 15–21 Chs. 22–27	Ch. 28	Chs. 29–31 (Job); Chs. 32–37 (Elihu) Chs. 38–41 (God)	Chs. 40:3-5; 42:1-6	Ch. 42:7-17

¹⁷Elmer B. Smick, "Architectonics, Structural Poems, and Rhetorical Devices in the Book of Job," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, p. 88. Cf. Westermann; and J. F. A. Sawyer, "The Authorship and Structure of the Book of Job," *Studia Biblica* 1 (1983):253-57.

Exposition

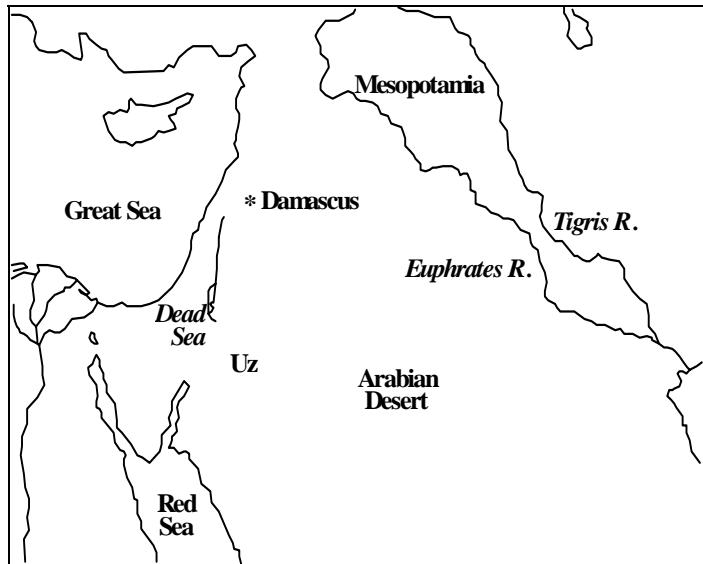
I. PROLOGUE CHS. 1—2

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

In the prologue events proceed rapidly in contrast to the slow-paced poetic section. The writer's purpose here was quite clearly to set the stage for what follows.

A. JOB'S CHARACTER 1:1-5

Uz (1:1) was probably southeast of the Dead Sea (cf. vv. 3, 14, 19; 42:12).¹⁸ Some scholars place it in Bashan south of Damascus, but the writer of Lamentations (probably Jeremiah) associated the land of Uz with Edom (Lam. 4:21). References to customs, geography, and natural history elsewhere in the book support this general location (cf. Jer. 25:20). All possible locations are outside Palestine suggesting that the message of this book is universal and not related exclusively to the Israelites.¹⁹



Job was no ordinary man. He was not even an ordinary good man (cf. v. 8; 2:3). He was an exceptionally admirable person because of his character and conduct (1:1). "Blameless" (Heb. *tam*) means complete. The word usually describes integrity and spiritual maturity. When Job sinned, he dealt with his sin appropriately, and evidence of his blamelessness. Job was not sinless (cf. 13:26; 14:16-17). "Upright" (Heb. *yasar*) refers to behavior that is in harmony with God's ways.

"He is not Everyman; he is unique."²⁰

"The fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, was the hallmark of Job."²¹

¹⁸See Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. "Uz," by G. Frederick Owen.

¹⁹Charles W. Carter, "The Book of Job," in Wesleyan Bible Commentary, 2:14.

²⁰Andersen, p. 79.

²¹Kline, p. 461.

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

". . . the meaning is apparently that the seven brothers took it in turn to entertain on the seven days of every week, so that every day was a feast day. This is more natural than the view that the reference is to birthdays, when there would be seven feasts a year. This is all part of the artistry of the story, to build up the picture of the ideal happiness of Job and his family."²²

Job demonstrated the proper spiritual concern for his own family members as well as interest in their physical and social welfare (1:3-4). Evidently he offered sacrifices each week for his children in case they had committed sins in their merriment. The phrase "rising up early in the morning" (v. 5) is a common Hebrew idiom for conscientious activity (cf. Gen. 22:3; et al.); it does not necessarily refer to the time of Job's sacrifice.²³

Job's character is important because this book reveals that the basis of the relationship between God and people is essentially God's sovereign grace and our response of trust and obedience.

The basic problem the Book of Job sets forth seems to be the relationship between God and man.²⁴

"The book of Job deals essentially with man's relationship with God, centering on two questions. The first question is, Why does man worship God? . . .

"The second question is, How will man react to God when God seems unconcerned about his problems?"²⁵

God chose to test an extremely righteous man so all of us could see that it was not Job's personal goodness that formed the basis for his relationship with God. If Job suffered being righteous, righteousness must not preclude suffering or guarantee God's protection.²⁶

²²Rowley, p. 29.

²³Andersen, p. 81.

²⁴Gregory W. Parsons, "The Structure and Purpose of the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:550 (April-June 1981):143. See also Henry L. Rowold, "The Theology of Creation in the Yahweh Speeches as a Solution to the Problem Posed by the Book of Job," pp. 11, 19; John W. Wevers, *The Way of the Righteous*, p. 75; Robert W. E. Forrest, "The Creation Motif in the Book of Job," p. 20; Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, pp. 197-98; Roy B. Zuck, *Job*, p. 189; and Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "Salvation by Grace: The Heart of Job's Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 (May 1966):259-70.

²⁵Roy B. Zuck, "A Theology of the Wisdom Books and the Song of Songs," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 219.

²⁶See Larry J. Waters, "Reflections on Suffering from the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:616 (October-December 1997):436-51.

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

B. JOB'S CALAMITIES 1:6—2:10

God permitted Satan to test Job twice.²⁷ The first test touched his possessions, including his children (1:6-22), and the second his person (2:1-10). God permitted Satan to afflict Job to demonstrate and to purify Job's motives for worshipping God and for living a godly life (cf. James 1:2-4). The writer takes us behind the scenes in this pericope (1:6—2:10) so we can know why Job's calamities befell him. In each test we first see Satan accusing Job in heaven and then attacking him on earth.²⁸

1. The first test 1:6-22

These verses reveal that angels ("sons of God," v. 6), including Satan, periodically report to God on their activities. Satan was doing then what he did in the Garden of Eden and still does today, namely, "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).²⁹ In Eden, Satan disparaged God to Eve. Here he disparaged Job to God.³⁰

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

Satan determined to prove that Job would not obey God if he got nothing in return. He believed selfishness prompted Job's obedience rather than love. Satan also believed that God would not get worship from Job if He stopped blessing him.

"Cynicism is the essence of the satanic. The Satan believes nothing to be genuinely good—neither Job in his disinterested piety nor God in His disinterested generosity."³¹

²⁷For a summary of what the Book of Job teaches about God, see Zuck, *A Theology . . .*, pp. 219-26. See also Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

²⁸The Scriptures consistently affirm that God tempts no one (James 1:13). That is, He is not the source of temptation and, therefore, the author of evil. However, it is equally clear that God allows us to experience temptation from other sources. The primary sources of our temptation are the world (1 John 2:15-16), the flesh (James 1:14), and the devil (Job 1—2).

²⁹Zuck also summarized the revelation concerning angels in Job in *A Theology . . .*, p. 232.

³⁰Kline, p. 462.

³¹Andersen, p. 84.

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

"The primary purpose of Job's suffering, unknown to him, was that he should stand before men and angels as a trophy of the saving might of God . . ."³²

"From the outset, the writer reminds us that, no matter what happens in this world and in our lives, God is on the throne and has everything under control."³³

The fact that the oxen were plowing (v. 14) indicates that these events probably happened in the winter. The Sabeans (v. 15) may have come from a region in southwest Arabia called Sheba or from the town of Sheba located in upper Arabia (cf. Gen. 10:7; 25:3). The Chaldeans (v. 17) came from Mesopotamia to the north and were at this time nomadic marauders, assuming a patriarchal period setting of the events.³⁴

Tearing one's robe (v. 20) typically expressed great grief in the ancient Near East. It symbolized the rending of one's heart (cf. Joel 2:13). Shaving the head (v. 20) evidently symbolized the loss of personal glory. When a person mourned, he or she put off all personal adornments, including what nature provided (cf. Jer. 7:29; Mic. 1:16). Hair in the ancient world was a symbol of one's glory (cf. 2 Sam. 14:26). Job apparently fell to the ground to worship God (v. 20). A mother's womb is a figure used elsewhere to describe the earth (v. 21; cf. Ps. 139:15; Eccles. 5:15; 12:7).

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

"Job's exclamation is the noblest expression to be found anywhere of a man's joyful acceptance of the will of God as his only good. A man may stand before God stripped of everything that life has given him, and still lack nothing."³⁵

"Anybody can say, 'The Lord gave' or 'The Lord hath taken away'; but it takes real faith to say in the midst of sorrow and suffering, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"³⁶

Job grieved but worshipped. These two activities are not incompatible. He saw God's hand in the events of his life. Moreover he had a proper perspective on his possessions. His faith did not relieve his agony; it caused it. Many people believe that if one has

³²Kline, p. 461.

³³Warren W. Wiersbe, "Job," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Wisdom and Poetry*, p. 11.

³⁴Kline, p. 462.

³⁵Andersen, p. 88.

³⁶Wiersbe, p. 12.

enough faith, he or she will always be happy. Job's experience does not bear this out. We should have a deep-seated joy no matter what happens to us knowing that we are in the Lord's hands and that He has permitted whatever happens to us (Phil. 4:4). But we may not always be happy, namely, enjoying our circumstances.

2. The second test 2:1-10

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

"Satan implies that Job, by his doxology had only feigned love for God as the exorbitant but necessary fee for health insurance."³⁷

Satan could do nothing to Job without God's permission. Having received that, he went out to strip Job of his health. Warren Wiersbe wrote somewhere that God allows us to enter the oven of affliction, but He keeps His hand on the controls.

In view of the symptoms mentioned later in the book, Job's ailment (vv. 7-8) seems to have been a disease called pemphigus foliaceous or something similar to it, perhaps elephantiasis (cf. vv. 7, 8, 12; 3:24-25; 7:5; 9:18; 16:16; 19:17, 20; 30:17, 27, 30; 33:21). It appears to have afflicted Job for several months (cf. 7:3; 29:2).

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

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

"The narrative reminds us repeatedly of the temptation in Eden (Gen 3). Job's wife plays a role remarkably like that of Eve. Each woman succumbed to the tempter and became his instrument for the undoing of her husband. Satan had spared Job's wife—as he had spared the four messengers—for his further use in his war on Job's soul."³⁸

³⁷Kline, p. 463.

³⁸Andersen, p. 88.

"In times of severe testing, our first question must not be, '*How* can I get out of this?' but '*What* can I get out of this?'"³⁹

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

Though many people today conclude, as Job's wife did, that the reason for suffering is that God is unjust, this is not the reason good people suffer. The basis for the relationship between God and man is not retribution, with good deeds resulting in prosperity and bad deeds yielding punishment in this life.⁴⁰

These two tests reveal much about Satan. He is an accuser of the righteous. He knows what is going on in the world and in the lives of individuals, though there is no evidence in Scripture that he can read people's minds. He has great power over individuals and nature, but his power is subject to the sovereign authority of God.

C. JOB'S COMFORTERS 2:11-13

Really four men came to visit Job, though the writer did not mention Elihu's presence until chapter 32. Eliphaz seems to have been the eldest for several reasons. His name occurs first (2:11; 42:9), he spoke before the others, his speeches are longer and more mature, and God spoke to him as the representative of the others (42:7). Eliphaz is an Edomite name (Gen. 36:4). He was probably either from Teman in Edom (cf. Jer. 49:7; Obad. 9) or from Tema in Arabia. Bildad may have been a relative of Shuah, Abraham's youngest son (Gen. 25:2). Zophar may have come from Naamah, a Judean town (Josh. 15:41), if it existed then.

Evidently the disfigurement that resulted from Job's disease prevented Job's acquaintances from recognizing him and led to their extreme grief that they manifested in ways common in their culture. The writer did not explain why they did not speak to him for seven days. This may have been traditional, or they may have spoken to no one out of respect for him. A week was the usual time of mourning for the dead (cf. Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13; Sir. 22:12), so they may have been mourning for him as one already dead. Perhaps they discussed his condition among themselves but did not do so with him. Apparently they waited for him to speak first (ch. 3) before they addressed him directly, as was customary.

"For one of them to speak prior to the sufferer would have been in bad taste."⁴¹

³⁹Wiersbe, p. 13.

⁴⁰For a critique of the "prosperity gospel" movement, which teaches that it is never God's will for any believer to be sick or poor, see Ken K. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):329-52.

⁴¹Elmer B. Smick, "Job," in *1 Kings-Job*, vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 887.

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

"In overwhelming sorrows, true friendship almost invariably demonstrates itself more perfectly by silence than by speech. And even in spite of the fact that Job's friends caused him sorrow by their words, they are more to be admired because what they thought concerning him they dared to say to him, rather than *about* him to others."⁴²

"Don't try to explain everything; explanations never heal a broken heart. If his friends had listened to him, accepted his feelings, and not argued with him, they would have helped him greatly; but they chose to be prosecuting attorneys instead of witnesses."⁴³

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

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

A. JOB'S PERSONAL LAMENT CH. 3

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

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

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

Job evidently considered his conception as the beginning of his existence (v. 3). His poetic description of his birth sets forth his regret that he had left his mother's womb alive (cf. Jer. 20:14-18).

⁴²G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 202.

⁴³Wiersbe, p. 14.

"Leviathan [3:8] was a seven-headed sea monster of ancient Near Eastern mythology. In the Ugaritic literature of Canaan and Phoenicia, eclipses were said to be caused by Leviathan's swallowing the sun and moon. Job said, 'Let thou curse it [the night of my conception] who curse the day, who are prepared to arouse Leviathan.' He was referring to a custom of sorcerers or enchanters, who claimed to have the power to make a day unfortunate by rousing the dragon asleep in the sea and inciting it to swallow the sun or moon. Thus, if the daytime or nighttime luminary were gone, Job's birthday would, in a sense, be missing. Was Job indicating belief in a creature of mythology? No, he was probably doing nothing more than utilizing for poetic purposes a common notion that his hearers would understand. This would have been similar to modern adults' referring to Santa Claus. Mentioning his name does not mean that one believes such a person exists."⁴⁴

Job wanted to express in many ways his regret that he had been born. Evidently the reason Job longed for nonexistence was his failure to understand his relationship with God or his place in the universe. Job had many questions about the creation order. He seems to have realized that understanding his relationship to God and his place in creation required an understanding of creation. In clarifying Job's relationships, Elihu and God also said much about creation. This appears to be the reason the creation motif is so prevalent in the Book of Job.⁴⁵ An understanding of creation is indeed essential to our correct understanding of who we are and what our relationship to God is (Gen. 1—2).⁴⁶

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

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

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

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

"My groaning comes at the sight of my food" (v. 24) may mean that food was not appealing to him. Probably he also meant that his groaning was as regular and frequent as

⁴⁴Zuck, *Job*, p. 24. Cf. 41:1; Ps. 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1. For fuller discussion of the Canaanite mythology involving Leviathan, see Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, pp. 329-31; and Smick, "Job," pp. 863-71.

⁴⁵See Parsons, pp. 145-47, for further discussion of the creation motif, and Leo G. Perdue, "Job's Assault on Creation," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986):295-315.

⁴⁶This is one reason people need to understand the Genesis record of creation accurately. Three fine organizations that provide materials (books, pamphlets, audio tapes, videos, seminar speakers, etc.) for all ages to this end are: The Institute for Creation Research, 10946 Woodside Avenue North, Santee, CA 92071; Answers in Genesis, P.O. Box 6330, Florence, KY 41022; and Creation Science Foundation, P.O. Box 6302, Acacia Ridge DC, QLD 4110, Australia.

his meals. The parallel idea at the end of verse 24 means his pain was as unending as a stream.

Here is a summary of Job's feelings when he uttered this soliloquy. He was bitter (v. 20) but not out of control. He was angry with God (v. 23) but not cursing God.⁴⁷ He was in despair but not defiant toward God. He was feeling his pain intensely but not accusing God of being unjust. His grief had not yet descended to its lowest depths.

Many people reach the same level in the strata of grief that Job did here. They long to die but do not contemplate suicide. The pressure of pain squeezes out the memories of past pleasures. The present agony becomes so overwhelming that they cannot see hope beyond it. My own father suffered with bone cancer and before he died longed for death even though he was a godly believer. This experience of great pain is the will of God for some people. We must not make the mistake of misjudging those who are going through this "valley of the shadow of death" as Job's friends did.

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

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

"Now the discussion begins. Soon it will become a debate, then a dispute; and the Lord will have to intervene to bring matters to a head."⁴⁸

"There are two basic lines of interaction which run through Job—Job's crying out to God and Job's disputations with his three friends. The absence of the third speech of Zophar is consistent with the fact that each of the speeches of the three friends is progressively shorter in each cycle and that Job's responses to each of the friends (which also are progressively shorter) are longer than the corresponding speech of the friends. This seems to signify Job's verbal victory over Zophar and the other two friends. It is also indicative of the bankruptcy and futility of dialogue when both Job and the three friends assume the retribution dogma (which for the friends implies Job's guilt and for Job implies God's injustice). Consequently, this structural design marks a very gradual swing toward a focus on Job's relationship and interaction with God in contrast to the earlier primary interaction between Job and his friends."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Job used the same Hebrew word to describe himself as one "hedged in" by God with darkness and disfavor (v. 23) that Satan used to describe Job as one whom God had "made a hedge about" to protect him from evil (1:10).

⁴⁸Wiersbe, p. 15.

⁴⁹Parsons, p. 140.

Throughout the three cycles of speeches Job's friends did not change their position. They believed that God rewards the righteous and punishes sinners in this life, the theory of retribution.⁵⁰ They reasoned that all suffering is punishment for sin, and since Job was suffering, he was a sinner. They believed that what people experience depends on what they have done (cf. John 9:2). While this is true often, it is not the fundamental reason we experience what we do in life, as the Book of Job proceeds to reveal.

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

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

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

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

1. Eliphaz's first speech chs. 4—5

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

- "A Opening remark (4:2)
- B Exhortation (4:3-6)
- C God's dealings with men (4:7-11)
- D The revelation of truth (4:12-21)
- C' God's dealings with men (5:1-16)
- B' Exhortation (5:17-26)
- A' Closing remark (5:27)^{"51}

⁵⁰See Sarles, pp. 329-52.

⁵¹Andersen, p. 111.

Eliphaz's rebuke of Job 4:1-6

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

Eliphaz's view of suffering 4:7-11

This is one of the clearest expressions of Eliphaz's view of why people suffer and his view of the basis for the divine-human relationship (v. 7). He believed good people always win and the bad always lose. He was asserting that Job's sins were finding him out. Bildad and Zophar shared this conclusion, but experience does not support it, as Job pointed out later. Eliphaz also explained the basis for his arguments: personal experience (v. 8). Unfortunately any one person's individual experience is too limited to provide enough data with which to answer the great questions Job and his friends discussed.

Eliphaz's vision 4:12-21

Eliphaz's authority was a vision (v. 12). It seems that his vision was not a revelation from God for the following reasons. He did not say that it was from the Lord. God normally identified revelations from Himself as such to those who received them when He used this method of revelation. Furthermore the content of what Eliphaz received in the vision (vv. 17-21) does not represent God as He has revealed Himself elsewhere in Scripture. God appears here as unconcerned with people. Evidently Eliphaz's "spirit" (v. 15) was not the Holy Spirit, and this Hebrew word never describes a disembodied spirit. Perhaps the spirit was an evil angel. What he heard from this spirit contained elements of truth: man cannot make himself pure before God, and man is mortal. Still Eliphaz was wrong in applying these words to Job as though Job was a willful sinner (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3).⁵²

Eliphaz's counsel to Job 5:1-16

Job's friend did not deny that the wicked fool (cf. Ps. 14:1) prospers temporarily (v. 3), but he believed that before a person dies God will punish him for his sins. Jesus disagreed (Luke 13:4). The well-known comparison in verse 7 is true to an extent, but Eliphaz was again wrong in connecting this truth with the reason for Job's suffering. People certainly do experience trouble in life as surely as sparks ascend from an open fire.⁵³

"What God did in Job's case, Eliphaz implied, was to bring suffering into his life as a wake-up call, an alarm to help him come to grips with the reality of his sin."⁵⁴

⁵²See James L. Crenshaw, "The Acquisition of Knowledge in Israelite Wisdom Literature," *Word & World* 7:3 (Summer 1986):251.

⁵³For a synthesis of God's revelation about man in the Book of Job, see Zuck, "A Theology . . .," pp. 226-31.

⁵⁴Merrill, p. 380.

"Most people will agree that *ultimately* God blesses the righteous, His own people, and judges the wicked; but that is not the question discussed in Job. It is not the *ultimate* but the *immediate* about which Job and his three friends are concerned, and not only they but also David (Ps. 37), Asaph (Ps. 73), and even the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 12:1-6)."⁵⁵

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

"Eliphaz as a counselor is a supreme negative example. Great truths misapplied only hurt more those who are already hurting."⁵⁶

"You do not heal a broken heart with logic; you heal a broken heart with love."⁵⁷

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

Eliphaz concluded his speech by urging Job to repent of his sin. Since God was good He would then bless Job who could die prosperous and happy. Eliphaz's final statement reveals smug self-satisfaction (v. 27).

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

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

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

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

Job's reason for complaining 6:1-7

Job said he complained because of his great irritation. His calamities were as heavy as wet sand (vv. 2-3). The Hebrew word translated "iniquity" in verse 2 occurs only here in the Old Testament. We should probably translate it "calamity" or "misfortune." Job

⁵⁵Wiersbe, p. 17.

⁵⁶Smick, "Job," p. 896.

⁵⁷Wiersbe, p. 17.

implied that his words of complaint were nothing in comparison to his suffering. His situation was harder for him to bear because he believed his misfortune came from God.

"The God he had known and the God he now experiences seemed irreconcilable."⁵⁸

Job refused to accept his trials without something to make them bearable, namely, complaining. Similarly a person refuses tasteless food without salt (vv. 6-7).

Job's desperate condition 6:8-13

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

"Life is like a weaving, and only God can see the total pattern and when the work is finished."⁵⁹

Job affirmed his faithfulness to God's words (v. 10) but acknowledged that he had no hope and no help to live. Verse 13 should read as an affirmation rather than as a question: "Indeed my help . . . and deliverance is driven from me."

"The fact that Job speaks about God in the third person should not be permitted to give the wrong impression. He is actually praying, not talking to Eliphaz. Such a convention is common in the respectful address to a superior."⁶⁰

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

"If, up to this point, Job has been praying, or at least soliloquizing, now he makes a more direct attack on the friends (the 'you' in verse 21 is plural)."⁶¹

"Eliphaz has attacked Job's complaint; Job now attacks Eliphaz' 'consolation'.⁶²

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

⁵⁸Rowley, p. 58.

⁵⁹Wiersbe, p. 20.

⁶⁰Andersen, p. 129.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 130.

⁶²Kline, p. 468.

Evidently Job's friends were afraid of him (v. 21) in the sense that they feared that if they comforted him God would view them as approving of his sin and would punish them as well.⁶³

"Verse 21 is the climax of Job's reaction to his friends' counsel [thus far]. They offered no help."⁶⁴

"There is no act of pastoral care more unnerving than trying to say the right thing to someone hysterical with grief. It is early in the day for Job to lose patience with them. But the point is not whether Job is unfair: this is how he feels. The truth is already in sight that only God can speak the right word. And Job's wits are sharp enough to forecast where Eliphaz's trend of thought will end—in open accusation of sin. Hence he gets in first with a pre-emptive strike, anticipating in the following denials his great speech of exculpation in chapter 31."⁶⁵

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

Next Job invited his friends to identify the sin for which they believed God was punishing him.⁶⁶ So far Eliphaz had only alluded to it. Job welcomed specific honest criticism, not arguments based on insinuations (v. 25). In verse 30 Job seems to be claiming the ability to know whether his afflictions were the result of sin or not, as a person can distinguish different tastes in his or her mouth.

Job's miserable suffering 7:1-6

"The rest of Job's speech is more like a soliloquy which turns into a remonstration against God Himself. His theme is once more the *hard service* that men have *upon earth*."⁶⁷

In this complaint (cf. ch. 3; 6:8-13) Job compared himself to a slave or hired servant and concluded that he was in a worse condition. In verse 6 one Hebrew word occurs twice and reads first "shuttle" and then "hope." Job had run out of hope as a weaver's shuttle runs out of thread.

Job's prayer to God 7:7-21

Throughout his sufferings Job did not turn away from God. Often people undergoing severe affliction do forsake Him. However, Job kept God in view and kept talking to God even though he did not know what to ask, which was a major part of his torment. I

⁶³Rowley, pp. 73-74. Cf. Andrew Blackwood Jr., *A Devotional Introduction to Job*, p. 65.

⁶⁴Smick, "Job," p. 901.

⁶⁵Andersen, p. 133.

⁶⁶See Westermann, pp. 97-99, for a discussion of Job's claim of innocence.

⁶⁷Andersen, p. 134.

believe this accounts for his ability to maintain his sanity and to come through his adversity finally. It is when people abandon God in their suffering that they get into serious trouble spiritually.

Job believed he would die soon. Yet he did not ask to die here as he had earlier (3:20-22). This slight upturn in his feelings may be the result of his praying to God.⁶⁸ Sheol (v. 9) refers to the grave in the Old Testament. The ancients thought it was the place where the spirits of people went when they died. Their condition there was a mystery in the patriarchal period.⁶⁹

Since his friends could not identify his sin, Job asked God why he was suffering. In this prayer Job complained that God would not leave him alone so he could die. Job felt God was hounding him for no apparent reason. God would not let Job alone long enough for him even to swallow his saliva (v. 19), a proverbial expression meaning "for a moment." He asked God to point out his sin if he had sinned (v. 20; cf. 6:24). Job believed he had done nothing worthy of such suffering (v. 21).

"I would suggest that the imagery of Job 7:12 . . . has been chosen by the poet to articulate precisely the main thrust of Job's protest against God (i.e., the deity's relentless surveillance), and in doing so the poet has created a text with clear mythologized content but without a strict parallel . . . he has molded general mythological ideas to suit his own purpose."⁷⁰

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

I think Job reacted with hostility toward Eliphaz because of the way his friend tried to comfort him. Eliphaz assumed a position of having superior knowledge based on his personal experience. He forced Job into the mold of being a great sinner to keep his theory of retribution intact. Job did not appreciate being put down or made to look like a greater sinner than he was. He had formerly held Eliphaz's theory, but now he believed that it was not always true. Job's was a common reaction to counsel that comes from someone who claims greater experience, either direct or vicarious, even experience derived from Scripture. This approach often produces an overreaction. Job refused to admit he was a sinner at all. It also offends people when they have considerable experience in life themselves. Eliphaz had no reason to be surprised when the person he was trying to help rebuked him.

⁶⁸Carter, 2:65.

⁶⁹See H. C. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973):1-54.

⁷⁰David A. Diewert, "Job 7:12: *Yam, tannin* and the surveillance of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:2 (1987):215. See also Elmer B. Smick, "Mythology and the Book of Job," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (Spring 1970):101-8; and idem, "Another Look at the Mythological Elements in the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978):213-28.

3. Bildad's first speech ch. 8

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

The justice of God 8:1-7

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

"Bildad is objective and analytical in his speech about God and man. As a result he is a neat but superficial thinker. He is a moralist, and in his simple theology everything can be explained in terms of two kinds of men—the blameless (*tam*, verse 20a; used of Job in 1:1) and the secretly wicked (*hanep*, verse 13b). Outwardly the same, God distinguishes them by prospering the one and destroying the other."⁷¹

Bildad's callous reference to the death of Job's children (v. 4) amounts to, "They got just what they deserved!" His point was that if Job was not sinning, God would be unjust in allowing him to suffer calamities. He asserted that God does not punish righteousness (vv. 6, 20). He erroneously assumed his basic premise that all suffering is punishment for sin, the retributive dogma.

"Obviously the friends' theology was far more important than Job."⁷²

The evidence from history 8:8-10

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

"Bildad's position is that what is true is not new, and what is new is not true."⁷³

Still, many heresies have long and impressive pedigrees.

⁷¹Andersen, p. 140.

⁷²Bullock, p. 34.

⁷³S. R. Driver and G. B. Grey, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 78.

Illustrations of Job's godlessness 8:11-19

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

The possibility of blessing 8:20-22

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

"Bildad's assertion that *God will not reject a blameless man* (20a) makes him the precursor of those who mocked Jesus with the same logic: 'He trusts in God; let God deliver him' (Mt. 27:43). Job has a lesser Calvary, and each person has his own. But when we know about God's rejection of Jesus, our dereliction can never again be as dark as Job's."⁷⁴

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

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

"Bildad's speech contains an important negative lesson about human nature in general and about the qualities of a good counselor. He heard Job's words with his ears, but his heart heard nothing."⁷⁵

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

"From this point on, the emphasis in the discussion is on *the justice of God*; and the image that is uppermost in Job's mind is that of *a legal trial*.⁷⁶

The greatness of God 9:1-12

Job began his response to Bildad by acknowledging that much of what his friends had said was true (v. 2). Many of Job's speeches began with sarcasm or irony. He then turned to a question that Eliphaz had raised earlier (4:17) that seems to have stuck in Job's mind.

⁷⁴Andersen, pp. 142-43.

⁷⁵Smick, "Job," p. 905.

⁷⁶Wiersbe, pp. 22-23.

How could he, a righteous man, much less the ungodly, stand righteous before God, as Eliphaz had urged him to do (5:8), since God was tormenting him. God appeared to Job to be acting arbitrarily and capriciously. How can anyone be right before such a God?

"This is not a question about salvation ('How may I be justified?') but about vindication ('How can I be declared innocent?')."⁷⁷

"Job's first address to Bildad was a magnificent confession of the sovereignty of God. . . Yet Job's recognition of God's sovereignty is more fatalistic than grounded in the nature of God as a just and righteous One."⁷⁸

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

1. If I disputed with Him, I could not answer Him, because He is so mighty (9:3-14).
2. If God did respond to my cry, I do not think He would be listening, because He is against me (9:15-19).
3. If I am righteous, He will declare me guilty, because He destroys both the innocent and the wicked (9:20-24).
4. If I try to forget my problems or even confess my sins, He would still consider me guilty (9:25-32)."⁷⁹

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

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

The arbitrary actions of God 9:13-24

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

"Far from being arrogant, Job is subdued, even to the point of self-loathing (verse 21b)."⁸⁰

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁸Merrill, p. 382.

⁷⁹Zuck, *Job*, p. 47.

⁸⁰Andersen, p. 148.

Job came to the point of concluding that it did not matter whether he was innocent since God destroys both the guiltless, like himself, and the wicked (v. 22). Further evidences of His injustice include the facts that innocent people die in plagues (v. 23) and the wicked prosper in the earth (v. 24).

". . . in Exod. 23:8 bribery is condemned because it covers the eyes of officials so that they cannot see where justice lies. Job here says it is God who blinds the judges to the truth. All the injustice that prevails in the world is laid at his door."⁸¹

Job rebutted his friends' contention that God consistently blesses the good and blasts the evil with examples that he drew from life generally, not just from his own experiences.⁸² In this he showed sensitivity to Bildad's respect for tradition.

"The friends had condemned Job that God might be righteous—according to their standard. Job, defending himself against their unjustified insinuations, is driven to condemn God that he himself might be righteous (cf. 40:8)."⁸³

The unfairness of God 9:25-35

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

The Book of Job uses legal terms and metaphors extensively in the sections that deal with Job's disputes with God. Job had previously served as a judge in his town (29:7-17), and he wanted justice (Heb. *mispat*) from God.⁸⁴ Therefore he used legal terminology frequently in his dialogues. These legal metaphors are one of the key features of the book since they help us identify its purpose.⁸⁵

Job's frustration, expressed in verses 32-33, is understandable since God was both his legal adversary and his judge. This accounts for his urgent yet hopeless cry for a neutral party (mediator, umpire) to arbitrate a settlement between himself and God. In the ancient Near East this arbitrator was a judge whose verdict was more often a settlement proposal that the litigants could either accept or reject.⁸⁶ Job had no hope of receiving justice from God—only mercy (v. 34). He felt that since God was so great he could not vindicate himself.

⁸¹Rowley, pp. 80-81.

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

⁸³Kline, p. 470.

⁸⁴See Sylvia H. Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mispat* in the Book of Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982):521-29.

⁸⁵Parsons, pp. 147-50.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 148. Cf. 13:7-12; 16:18-21. See Wiersbe, p. 25.

"This is the persistent problem, the real problem of the book: not the problem of suffering, to be solved intellectually by supplying a satisfactory answer which explains why it happened; but the attainment of a right relationship with God which makes existence in suffering holy and acceptable."⁸⁷

"I am not like that in myself" (9:35) means 'that is not the way it is with regard to my case.'⁸⁸

Job's challenge to God ch. 10

This whole chapter, another prayer (cf. 7:7-21), is a cry to God for answers: "Let me know why . . ." (v. 2). Notice the legal setting again, especially in verse 2. Job again claimed to be not guilty (v. 7).

"It is a remarkable fact, apparently unobserved by commentators, but very revealing of Job's mind, that in none of his petitions does he make the obvious request for his sickness to be cured. As if everything will be all right when he is well again! That would not answer the question which is more urgent than every other concern: 'Why?'"⁸⁹

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

"If we are tempted to criticize [Job], we should ever remember that in the whole Book God lays no charge against His child. Terrible things were these which Job uttered about God, but at least they were honest."⁹⁰

5. Zophar's first speech ch. 11

Zophar took great offense at what Job had said. He responded viciously with an aggressiveness that outdid both Eliphaz and Bildad. Zophar was a dogmatist.

"He . . . attempted heavy handed shock treatment to get through to Job."⁹¹

⁸⁷Andersen, p. 151. Cf. 4:17; 9:2, 3, 14. See also Smick, "Job," p. 912.

⁸⁸Zuck, *Job*, p. 50.

⁸⁹Andersen, p. 152.

⁹⁰Morgan, p. 206.

⁹¹Smick, "Job," p. 917.

"The Naamathite is the least engaging of Job's three friends. There is not a breath of compassion in his speech. . . . His censorious chiding shows how little he has sensed Job's hurt. Job's bewilderment and his outbursts are natural; in them we find his humanity, and our own. Zophar detaches the words from the man, and hears them only as *babble* and mockery (verse 2). This is quite unfair. Zophar's wisdom is a bloodless retreat into theory. It is very proper, theologically familiar and unobjectionable. But it is flat beer compared with Job's seismic sincerity."⁹²

"What Job needed was a helping hand, not a slap in the face."⁹³

"How sad it is when people who should share ministry end up creating misery."⁹⁴

Zophar's rebuke of Job 11:1-6

Four things about Job bothered Zophar: his loquacity (v. 2), his boasting (v. 3), his self-righteousness (v. 4), and his ignorance (v. 5). Verses 5 and 6 are full of sarcasm. Zophar believed Job deserved much worse punishment than God was giving him (v. 6b).

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

Eliphaz and Bildad had spoken mainly of God's justice. Zophar extolled His wisdom. He rightly explained that God's wisdom is unfathomable, but he inadvertently claimed to fathom it by saying Job deserved more punishment than he was getting. Verse 12 may have been a proverb common in Job's day. It means that it is harder for a fool (empty head) to learn wisdom than for a wild donkey, notorious for its stupidity, to give birth to a man. In Zophar's view Job was extremely foolish because he failed to see the truth of what Eliphaz and Bildad had said.

Zophar's appeal to Job 11:13-20

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

"If Zophar was rough of manner, his desire and hope for Job may be observed, for his description of the prosperity which will come if he but set his heart right is longer and more beautiful than that of either Eliphaz or Bildad."⁹⁵

⁹²Andersen, p. 156.

⁹³Wiersbe, p. 26

⁹⁴Ibid. Cf. Rom. 12:15.

⁹⁵Morgan, p. 206.

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

"The child who defined 'sympathy' as 'your pain in my heart' knew more about giving comfort than did these three."⁹⁶

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

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

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

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

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

"The grounds of Job's assault on his friends should be appreciated, for his attitude has been commonly misconstrued by commentators. In particular, they often say that Job doubts the justice of God. But the warning he gives his friends is based on certainty that they cannot deceive God (9), or get away with things done *in secret* (10). God will deal with them in strict justice, and their 'defences [sic] will crumble like clay' (12, NEB)."⁹⁷

Verse 12 may also be irony; this was not what Job believed. On the other hand Job may have been quoting his friends or asking a rhetorical question: "Is wisdom with aged men . . .?" Job then proceeded to show that God is the only truly wise Person (12:13) in refutation of Bildad (8:8). Job mentioned several outrageous acts of God that demonstrate His mysterious wisdom (cf. chs. 38—41). He also pointed out God's great power as seen in the processes of nature and the affairs of nations (12:14-21). Man can only understand God's ways by special revelation from God. His ways are inscrutable (12:22; cf. 11:7). God also darkens people's understanding (12:24-25). In short, history shows that all the

⁹⁶Wiersbe, p. 19.

⁹⁷Andersen, pp. 164, 165.

world's leading authorities have not enjoyed God's blessing as they should have if his friends' major premise was correct (12:13-25).

If his companions wanted to appeal to their own experience as authoritative, Job would too (13:1-2). Since Job's friends could not solve his problems, he asked God to speak with him (13:3). "Smear with lies" (13:4) means "plaster with lies," cover up the truth.⁹⁸ Job urged his counselors to keep quiet (v. 5).

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

As he prepared to present his case to God, Job asked his friends to be silent and to listen (13:13-19; cf. 13:5, 6). Job realized he was risking his life to speak to God as he did (13:14). One translation of verse 15 is, "Behold, He will slay me; I do not have hope. I will present my case to His face."⁹⁹ Job evidently expected God to kill him for what he was about to say, but he wanted answers more than life. Job had prepared his defense as a good lawyer (13:18a), and he believed he would win his case (13:18b; cf. 9:28b) even though God would kill him. Still his hope was in God (v. 15). He again asserted his innocence (13:19a).

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

As in his replies to Eliphaz (7:12-21) and Bildad (9:28-33; 10:2-19), Job also addressed God in this reply to Zophar (13:20—14:22).

Job asked God to stop afflicting him and to stop terrifying him (13:20-21). He also requested a courtroom confrontation with God (13:22). God did not reply, so Job asked Him to list his sins (13:23). Still there was no answer. This led Job to ask why God was hiding and hostile to him (13:24-26). Frustrated by God's lack of response, Job sank down again into despair.

Job's despair ch. 14

In this melancholic lament Job bewailed the brevity of life (vv. 1-6), the finality of death (vv. 7-17), and the absence of hope (vv. 18-22).

"Born of woman" (v. 1) reflects man's frailty since woman who bears him is frail. Verse 4 means, "Who can without God's provision of grace make an unclean person clean?" (cf. 9:30-31; 25:4). God has indeed determined the life span of every individual (v. 5).

⁹⁸Victor Reichert, *Job*, p. 61.

⁹⁹Zuck, *Job*, p. 61.

It seemed unfair to Job that a tree could come back to life after someone had cut it down, but a person could not (vv. 7-10). As I mentioned before, Job gives no evidence of knowing about divine revelation concerning what happens to a human being after death. He believed in life after death (v. 13) but he did not know that there would be bodily resurrection from Sheol, the place of departed spirits (v. 12). He longed for the opportunity to stand before God after he entered Sheol (v. 14) to get the answers from God that God would not give him on earth.

Essentially Sheol in the Old Testament is the place where the dead go. There was common belief in the continuing personal existence of one's spirit after death. When the place where unrighteous people go is in view, the reference is to hell. When the righteous are in view, Sheol refers to either death or the grave.¹⁰⁰

God later revealed that everyone, righteous and unrighteous, will stand before Him someday (Acts 24:15). God will resurrect the bodies of the dead to enable them to do so (Heb. 9:27; et al.). Job believed he would have this opportunity, though he had no assurance from God that he would (v. 16). Evidently Job believed as he did because it seemed to him that such an outcome would be right. He evidently believed in the theoretical possibility of resurrection.¹⁰¹ When he finally had his meeting with God, Job was confident that God would clear him of the false charges against him.

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

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

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

In the second cycle of speeches Job's companions did not change their minds about why Job was suffering and the larger issue of the basis of the divine-human relationship. They continued to hold the dogma of retribution: that God without exception blesses good people and punishes bad people *in this life*. The spirit of Job's "friends" did change, however, to one of greater hostility. They seem to have abandoned hope that direct appeals to Job would move him to repent because they no longer called on him to repent. Instead they stressed the fate of the wicked and indirectly urged him to repent. In their first speeches their approach was more intellectual; they challenged Job to think logically. In their second speeches their approach was more emotional; they sought to convict Job's conscience.

¹⁰⁰See A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels*, ch. 3: "Death and Afterlife."

¹⁰¹See James Orr, "Immortality in the Old Testament," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 259.

"In the first [cycle of speeches] Eliphaz had emphasised [*sic*] the moral perfection of God, Bildad his unwavering justice, and Zophar his omniscience. Job in reply had dwelt on his own unmerited sufferings and declared his willingness to meet God face to face to argue his case. Having failed to stir his conscience, the friends see in him a menace to all true religion, and in the second cycle their rebukes are sharper than in the first, though their characters are still carefully preserved."¹⁰²

1. Eliphaz's second speech ch. 15

Job's responses so far had evidently convinced Eliphaz that Job was a hardened sinner in defiant rebellion against God.¹⁰³

"There is a great change in tone between this address of Eliphaz and the first. There is no tenderness here. The philosophy of life is stated wholly on the negative side, and it was impossible for Job to misunderstand the meaning."¹⁰⁴

Job's attitude rebuked 15:1-16

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

"Eliphaz was using one of the oldest tactics in debate—if you can't refute your opponent's arguments, attack his words and make them sound like a lot of hot air."¹⁰⁵

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

"This is another debater's trick: when you can't refute the speech, ridicule the speaker."¹⁰⁶

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

¹⁰²Rowley, p. 107.

¹⁰³Pope, p. 114.

¹⁰⁴Morgan, p. 208.

¹⁰⁵Wiersbe, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

The fate of the wicked 15:17-35

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

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

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

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

The reasons for the judgments were essentially two: rebellion against God (vv. 25-26) and self-indulgence (vv. 27-28). Verse 28 may mean, "He proudly lived in ruined cities and rebuilt houses previously unoccupied, thus defying the curse on ruined sites (15:28; cf. Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34)."¹⁰⁷

Seven more judgments follow in verses 29-35. The wicked person will not prosper (v. 29) but will die (v. 30a). His works will fail (v. 30b-c) and he will suffer prematurely (v. 31-32a; cf. 4:8). His wealth will fail (v. 32b-33), he will experience barrenness (v. 34; cf. 3:7; 4:21; 8:22), and he deceives himself (v. 31). Note that Eliphaz began this section with a reference to childbirth (v. 20) and ended it with another reference to the same thing (v. 35). Not all these judgments are completely distinct from one another. Poetic parallelism often uses a slight restatement to make a more forceful impression rather than to express a different idea.

"It is a subtlety of our author that Eliphaz, who began by calling Job a wind-bag (verse 2), ends his own speech with a pile of verbiage. With tedious repetition, assertion not argument, he presents the doctrine 'you reap what you sow' in several forms."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Zuck, *Job*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁸Andersen, p. 179.

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

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

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

Job said his visitors had said nothing new to help him (v. 1). He picked up Eliphaz's word (translated "mischief" in 15:35) and used it to describe him and his companions as "sorry" comforters (v. 2). Eliphaz's words had not brought the consolation he had promised (15:11). Job charged his visitors with being the real windbags (v. 3; cf. 8:2; 15:2). He claimed that he himself would provide more comfort than they were delivering, which Eliphaz had previously admitted Job could do (4:4).

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

Job's friends did not cause his greatest discomfort, however; from Job's perspective God did. Most of the verses in this pericope are easy to understand. A better translation of verse 6b might be, "And if I hold back, it does not leave me."

"Job's assumption that God was angry with him [in v. 9] implies that Job subconsciously felt that God was punishing him for some unknown sin of which Job was unaware. He wished that God would reveal this to him (10:2)." ¹⁰⁹

Evidently Job had suffered abuse at the hands of young people who harassed him at the city dump where he was living (v. 11). A defeated animal often thrusts its horn or horns in the dust. Job compared himself to such an animal (v. 15). Again he admitted no action or attitude worthy of his intense suffering (v. 17).

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

Job called on the earth not to cover his blood (v. 18) so it might cry to God for vindication (cf. Gen. 4:10). Job did not want people to forget his case when he died. He wanted someone to answer his questions and to vindicate his innocence even if he was not alive to witness it. The witness and advocate to which he referred (v. 19) seem to be some heavenly witness other than God since he called this person a man (v. 21).¹¹⁰ Many commentators, however, believe Job had God in mind. Certainly the God-man, Jesus Christ, our advocate with the Father, is the person whom God provided to meet this need. However, Job did not have revelation concerning Him as far as the text indicates. Job longed for someone to plead with God for him since God was apparently ignoring his cries. Moreover Job's companions were not pleading his case as true friends should have done (16:20; 17:2).

"With increasing clarity Job is seeing that satisfactory answers might be gained only when he has more direct dealings with God after death."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Parsons, p. 154. Cf. 34:9; 35:3.

¹¹⁰See ibid., pp. 148-49.

¹¹¹Andersen, p. 183.

"In all the movement of this great answer it would seem as though outlines of the truth were breaking upon Job."¹¹²

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

Evidently in legal cases of this sort each litigant would give the judge a bond (money or some personal possession) before the trial. This bond would guarantee that the litigant would be fair and honest during the trial. If one of the litigants was not, the judge would not return his bond to him at the trial's end.¹¹³ Job called on God to lay down His pledge (as the prosecutor) with Himself (the judge; 17:3a). The guarantor (17:3b) was one who provided the bond if the person on trial could not. Job's supportive friends would normally have provided his bond, but they had turned against him. Job lay the ultimate responsibility for his friends' blindness and rejection at God's feet because God had withheld understanding from them. Consequently he believed God would not lift them up (17:4). Job may have believed part of his friends' motive in not helping him was that they could obtain a portion of his property when he died (17:5). However since verse 5 is a proverb, he may have only been reminding his friends of the serious consequences of slander.¹¹⁴

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

Job proceeded to accuse God of making him a byword (proverb) to others (v. 6). Perhaps parents were pointing to him as an example of what happens to a person who lives a hypocritical life. One writer suggested that verse 6 should read, "Therefore I repudiate and repent of dust and ashes."¹¹⁵ This statement would express Job's intention to abandon mourning. However most interpreters have not adopted this rendering. Job did not stop mourning.

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

Again Job ended his speech with a gloomy reference to the grave and his anticipated death (vv. 13-16).

"However, at no time did Job ever consider taking his own life or asking someone else to do it for him. Life is a sacred gift from God, and only God can give it and take it away."¹¹⁶

3. Bildad's second speech ch. 18

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

¹¹²Morgan, p. 208.

¹¹³Zuck, *Job*, p. 79.

¹¹⁴Smick, "Job," p. 933.

¹¹⁵Dale Patrick, "The Translation of Job XVII 6," *Vetus Testamentum* 26:3 (July 1976):369-71.

¹¹⁶Wiersbe, p. 35.

"Bildad's second speech is straightforward. It is no more than a long diatribe on the fate of the wicked (5-21), preceded by a few reproaches addressed to Job (2-4)."¹¹⁷

Bildad's criticism of Job 18:1-4

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

"A speaker who has run out of ideas can always resort to satire. No [true] pastor mocks a sufferer by throwing his own words back at him."¹¹⁸

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

Note some of the things both Eliphaz and Bildad pointed out concerning the wicked.

ELIPHAZ	THE WICKED . . .	BILDAD
15:22-23, 30	experience darkness	18:5-6, 18
15:30b, 32-33	are like unhealthy plants	18:16
15:30, 34	are destroyed by fire	18:15
15:27-31	lose their influence	18:7, 15-16
15:21, 24	are terrified by anguish	18:11, 14
15:34	lose their homes	18:6, 14-15
15:4, 13, 25-26	oppose or do not know God	18:21
15:13	are ensnared	18:8-10

Bildad painted four vivid pictures of the death of the wicked in this passage: a light put out (vv. 5-6), a traveler trapped (vv. 7-10), a criminal pursued (vv. 11-15), and a tree rooted up (vv. 16-21).¹¹⁹

Another noteworthy feature of this section is the frequent recurrence of the idea that the wicked will end up in a trap, especially in verses 8-10. Bildad promised not only their capture but that they would experience terror, as animals hunted down by a predator (v. 11). As in Eliphaz's second speech, much of what Bildad said here concerning the wicked

¹¹⁷Andersen, p. 187.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 188.

¹¹⁹Wiersbe, pp 37-38.

was true of Job (e.g., 18:13a, 15). "The first-born of death" may refer to "death in its most terrible form."¹²⁰ Another possibility is that this is a reference to Namtar, the Mesopotamian god of pestilence and vizier of the underworld.¹²¹ Both Job and Bildad had a lot to say about death.

"Bildad felt Job did not really understand the doctrine of retribution. He probably considered Job weak on this subject because Job kept harping on how the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. In these speeches Job and his friends had nothing to say about future retribution at the day of final judgment or the balancing of the scales of justice after death. This is a truth that unveils gradually (progressive revelation) in the OT."¹²²

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

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

This speech is one of the more important ones in the book because in it Job reached a new low and a new high in his personal experience. He revealed here the extent of his rejection by his friends, relatives, and servants, but he also came to a new confidence in God. Bildad had spoken of the terrors of death, and now Job described the trials of life, his own life. He did so by using seven figures to describe himself: an animal trapped (v. 6), a criminal in court (v. 7), a traveler fenced in (v. 8), a king dethroned (v. 9), a structure destroyed (v. 10), a tree uprooted (v. 10), and a city besieged (vv. 11-12).¹²³

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

Job began this reply to Bildad as Bildad had begun both of his speeches: "How long . . .?" (v. 2; cf. 8:2; 18:2). How long would his friends torment him? The ten times (v. 3) may have been ten actual occurrences not all of which the writer recorded, or Job may have used ten as a round number meaning often. Job claimed that God had not been just in his case (vv. 5-6; cf. 8:3). Rather than snaring himself in his own net, as Bildad insinuated (18:8-10), Job claimed that God had trapped him in His net. God had driven him into a hunter's net.¹²⁴

¹²⁰Rowley, p. 130.

¹²¹John B. Burns, "The Identity of Death's First-Born (Job XVIII 13)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37:3 (July 1987):362-64.

¹²²Smick, "Job," pp. 936-37.

¹²³Wiersbe, pp. 39-40.

¹²⁴Rowley, p. 134.

The hostility of God 19:7-12

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

Some readers of Job's words in this pericope have accused Job of blasphemy. However blasphemy is "any remark deliberately mocking or contemptuous of God."¹²⁵ Job was neither mocking God nor was he being contemptuous of God. He was simply describing God as he perceived Him to be. He could not understand why God was apparently treating him unjustly, and he repeatedly asked God to solve this mystery for him.

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

In describing the people Job referred to in this section, he started with those farthest from him and moved to those closest to him, and from Job's equals to his inferiors socially. Job may have meant by "the skin of my teeth" (v. 20b) narrowly or that his teeth had fallen out and only his gums remained. Having found no comfort in other people, Job next turned back to God.

Job's confidence in God 19:23-29

"But it is just here, when everything is blackest, that his faith . . . like the rainbow in the cloud . . . shines with a marvelous splendor."¹²⁶

This short section contains probably the best-known verses in the book (vv. 23-27). They are an affirmation of Job's great faith in God.¹²⁷

"One might even call Job the first Protestant, in the fullest sense of the word. He takes his stand upon individual faith rather than yielding to pious dogma."¹²⁸

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

¹²⁵Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language.

¹²⁶W. B. MacLeod, *The Afflictions of the Righteous*, p. 172.

¹²⁷Theophile J. Meek, "Job xix 25-27," *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956):100-103. James K. Zink, "Impatient Job," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84:2 (June 1965):147-52, argued that Job was not expressing hope but despair because he believed God could vindicate him but would not do so before he died.

¹²⁸Philip Yancey, "When the Facts Don't Add Up," *Christianity Today*, June 13, 1986, p. 21.

Job proceeded to reach out to God in faith (v. 25). Who is the redeemer to whom Job referred? Probably he is the same person he requested elsewhere when he called for a legal arbiter between himself and God (9:33) who would be a witness and an advocate for him (16:19). In this case, too, Job seems to have thought of a person other than God.¹²⁹ However he may have been God Himself in view of Job's confident statement that he believed he would see God (v. 26).

"The Old Testament records several notable instances where people such as Abraham, Moses and Isaiah 'saw' God, and Job doubtless has something similar in mind."¹³⁰

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

"In pagan theology a personal patron-deity acted as a champion for an individual human, pleading his cause in the council of the gods. In the Book of Job the angels perform this role. In 33:23 Elihu clearly presented his theology of angels that took the place of the pagan servant-deities. He employed the very root (*mls*) used in 16:20 to describe Job's 'Intercessor.' In each of these Advocate passages, the third party is greater than man; and in chapter 16 he lives in heaven. Yet he is fully capable of taking his stand to testify on earth (19:25)."¹³¹

Job was confident that his redeemer, whomever he may have had in mind, would take up his cause and vindicate him, probably after Job died.¹³² He added that this person would take His stand on earth "at the last" (i.e., finally, not at the end of time). In other words, this person would have the last word.

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

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

¹²⁹Parsons, pp. 148-49, 156-57.

¹³⁰Andersen, p. 193.

¹³¹Smick, "Job," p. 942.

¹³²Rowley, p. 138.

"Though there is no full grasping of a belief in a worthwhile Afterlife with God, this passage is a notable landmark in the progress toward such a belief."¹³³

The "another" person of verse 27 is another beside God, not another beside Job. Job would see God Himself. Evidently Job expected to see God after death, but there is no indication in the text that Job knew God would resurrect his body after he died. He believed in life after death, but he evidently did not know about the certain resurrection of the body. This revelation came from God after Job's lifetime (cf. Isaiah 26:19; Dan. 12:2).

"While he was anticipating the doctrine of resurrection, he was not spelling out the teaching of a final resurrection for all the righteous."¹³⁴

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

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

5. Zophar's second speech ch. 20

This speech must have hurt Job more than any that his friends had presented so far. Zophar was brutal in his attack. He continued the theme of the fate of the wicked that Eliphaz and Bildad had emphasized. However whereas Eliphaz stressed the distress of the wicked and Bildad their trapped position, Zophar elaborated on the fact that wicked people lose their wealth. He had nothing new to say, but he said it passionately.

Zophar's anger 20:1-3

"Therefore" (v. 2) must refer to what Job had said. Job had previously asked why his friends answered him (16:3). Zophar replied that the spirit of his understanding made him answer (v. 3b). Again he seems to be claiming innate, instinctive knowledge (cf. ch. 11).

The brief prosperity of the wicked 20:4-11

Zophar reminded Job that everyone knew the wicked only prosper for a short time (cf. 15:29). Verse 5 is his thesis statement. The description of the wicked that Zophar proceeded to draw fit Job very well and must have wounded him deeply. The life of the wicked is brief (vv. 4-11), their pleasure is temporary (vv. 12-19), and their death is painful (vv. 20-29).¹³⁵

¹³³Ibid., p. 140.

¹³⁴Smick, "Job," p. 943.

¹³⁵Wiersbe, pp. 42-44.

The certain punishment of sin 20:12-19

Verse 16 pictures the wicked eating his delicacies but finding that they have turned to poison in his stomach and are killing him (v. 14).

"Sin tastes good in the mouth but creates terrible cramps and nausea in the stomach (20:12-14)." ¹³⁶

Ancient Near Easterners considered honey and curds (the part of milk from which cheese comes) a great delicacy (cf. Judg. 5:25).

God's swift judgment of the wicked 20:20-29

Zophar explained that while the wicked greedily fill their own bellies, God sends His anger into their bowels (v. 23). In other words, the poor health that accompanies overindulgence is God's instrument of judgment on the wealthy wicked. If God does not punish him this way he will still not escape because God will catch him some other way (vv. 24-25; cf. 16:13). After he died, God would burn up his possessions and family in judgment as He already had done in Job's case (v. 26; cf. ch. 1). Rather than anticipating divine vindication on the earth, Job should expect God to reveal his iniquity and the earth to rise up against him (v. 27; cf. 16:18-19).

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

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

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

"This speech is unusual for Job on several counts. It is the only one in which he confines his remarks to his friends and does not fall into either a soliloquy or a prayer. The time has come to demolish their position. Secondly, in making this counter-attack, Job reviews a lot of the preceding discussion, so that many cross-references can be found to what has already been said. These are a valuable guide to interpretation when they can be discovered. Thirdly, by quoting their words and refuting them, Job comes nearer to formal debate. While his words are still quite emotional, there is less invective in them."¹³⁷

¹³⁶Merrill, p. 387.

¹³⁷Andersen, p. 198.

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

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

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

Job's friends had been selective in their observations regarding wicked people. They had pointed out only the cases in which God judged them on earth. Job now presented the other side of the story. There were many wicked who never experienced God's judgment before they died. His words contrast especially with what Zophar had just said (ch. 20). Many people who do not know God or reject him live peaceful, pleasant lives (vv. 14-15; cf. 18:21). Verse 16 may mean that these people's prosperity comes ultimately from God, not from themselves. Still Job did not want his friends to understand him as supporting their contempt for God (v. 16b).

The reason the wicked die 21:17-26

Job claimed that the wicked die for the same reason the righteous die. They are sinners. They do not inevitably die early because they are wicked sinners. Furthermore God does not punish the children of the wicked who die late in life for their parents' sins. Job said that would be no punishment on the parents since they would not be alive to witness their children's suffering. He also pointed out that his companions were putting God in a box by not allowing Him to judge freely but requiring that He behave according to their theological conceptions (v. 22).

"Those who do not believe in an absolutely sovereign God cannot possibly appreciate the depth of the problem Job presented in vv. 23-26. The answer still alludes us. Even with all our additional revelation (Rom. 8:28), we often stand in anguish over the apparent injustice and seeming cruelty of God's providence."¹³⁸

"Of course, Job is talking [in verse 26] about the *physical* side of death and not the *spiritual*. When death comes, it obviously makes a great deal of difference in the next life whether or not the person had faith in Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27)."¹³⁹

The lifelong prosperity of some wicked 21:27-34

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

¹³⁸Smick, "Job," p. 950.

¹³⁹Wiersbe, p. 46.

"If Job's friends inquired of well-traveled people, they would learn that in every part of the world, wicked people seem to escape the calamities that fall on the righteous."¹⁴⁰

Though some writers have taken verse 31 as a quotation of the view of Job's friends, it is probably Job's own view. "The day" is probably a reference to the final time God will judge the wicked.

This speech explains Job's position that certainly squares with reality better than the one his adversaries advocated. Frequently the wicked do prosper throughout their lives. God does not always cut off evil people prematurely. For example, even though Manasseh was Judah's worst king, he reigned the longest. Even through Mussolini and Hitler died violent deaths, Lenin and Stalin died in their own beds as old men. Furthermore, "All that desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Job accused his friends of being wrong.

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

"If you want to be an encouragement to hurting people, try to see things through their eyes. Be humble enough to admit that there might be other points of view."¹⁴¹

D. THE THIRD CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND HIS THREE FRIENDS

CHS. 22—27

In round one of the debate Job's friends probed his intellect, and in round two they probed his conscience. In round three they probed specific issues.

"The lamentable fact is that the friends endorsed Satan's view of Job as a hypocrite. Thinking to defend God, they became Satan's advocates, insisting that he whom God designated as His servant belonged to the devil."¹⁴²

We could summarize the criticisms of Job's three companions in their speeches as follows.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁴²Kline, p. 477.

CYCLE	ACCUSATION AGAINST JOB
FIRST	"You are a sinner and need to repent."
SECOND	"You are wicked and God is punishing you."
THIRD	"You have committed these specific sins."

1. Eliphaz's third speech ch. 22

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

"He [Eliphaz] made three serious accusations against Job: he is a sinner (Job 22:1-11), he is hiding his sins (vv. 12-20), and he must confess his sins and repent before God can help him (vv. 21-30)."¹⁴³

God's disinterest in Job 22:1-5

Verse 2 should end "Him" (i.e., God) rather than "himself" (i.e., the wise man).

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

Job's social sins 22:6-11

Verse 8 probably reflects what Eliphaz thought Job's attitude was. Eliphaz implied that Job arrogantly believed the strong, respected man of the world, not the godly man, is the one who controls others and dominates those around him.¹⁴⁴

Were Eliphaz's accusations valid? Were these sins Job had really committed? Job denied them in 31:16-22.

Job's spiritual defiance 22:12-20

Eliphaz proceeded next to judge Job's motives. He assumed Job had concluded that because God was far away in heaven he would get away with sin on earth. However, Job had affirmed God's omniscience (21:22).

"Presuming to read Job's secret thoughts, Eliphaz puts in Job's mouth blasphemies untrue to the sentiments he has actually expressed (vv. 12-14)."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³Wiersbe, p. 47.

¹⁴⁴Gordis, p. 180.

¹⁴⁵Kline, p. 478.

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

Job's need to repent 22:21-30

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

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

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

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

"The first part of this speech is superb. The option placed before Job by Eliphaz has clarified his thinking. He has come to quite different conclusions, and he expresses them in a soliloquy, for he does not appear to be addressing either Eliphaz or God."¹⁴⁶

Job's longing 23:1-7

Job admitted that he had rebelled against God to the extent that he had complained about his condition (v. 2a). "His hand" (v. 2b) is "My hand" in the Hebrew text. Job had not given up his desire to present his case before God before he died (cf. 9:14-16).

Job's innocence 23:8-12

Wherever Job looked, he could not find God. Two paraphrases of verse 10 are these. Because (the first word in the verse in Hebrew) He knows my ways, God is evading me. "He knows I am innocent and therefore is refusing to appear in court, for once He heard my case He would have to admit to injustice."¹⁴⁷ A better explanation, I think, follows.

"A more literal translation . . . yields: 'But he (God) knows (his) way with me.' Because God knows what He is doing with Job, Job is coming to a point where he will be satisfied even if God never explains the reason for His strange conduct. Earlier Job had demanded to know why God was dealing with him thus, and he found his trial insufferable (7:18). Now he accepts the testing, because he knows: *I shall come forth as gold.*"¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶Andersen, p. 207.

¹⁴⁷Zuck, *Job*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁸Andersen, p. 210.

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

"When God put His own people into the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long and how much."¹⁴⁹

Job's frustration 23:13—24:17

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

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

Job's confidence 24:18-25

These confusing verses may seem to be saying that God does punish the wicked. Probably Job was reflecting that God does indeed punish them in death if not in life.¹⁵⁰ What bothered him was why God did not punish them sooner.

Even with more revelation than Job enjoyed we still have great difficulty understanding God's ways generally and why He does what He does in specific individual lives particularly. God's wisdom is still unfathomable.

3. Bildad's third speech ch. 25

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

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

Verse 4 restates a basic question that had come up earlier in the debate (4:17; 9:2b; 15:14). The answer did not come in this book, but it came later with subsequent good

¹⁴⁹Wiersbe, p. 51.

¹⁵⁰Andersen, pp. 213-14.

news of God's grace. Perhaps Bildad raised it here to convince Job that neither he nor anyone else could be as guiltless as Job claimed to be. The illustrations that follow in verses 5-6 support his point.

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

"The best way to help discouraged and hurting people is to listen with your heart and not just with your ears. It's not what they say but *why they say it* that is important. Let them know that you understand their pain by reflecting back to them *in different words* just what they say to you. Don't argue or try to convince them with logical reasoning. There will be time for that later; meanwhile, patiently accept their feelings—even their bitter words against God—and build bridges, not walls."¹⁵¹

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

Job's long speech here contrasts strikingly with Bildad's short preceding speech (ch. 25).

In the first of these two chapters Job addressed his remarks to Bildad's most recent comments. In the second he broadened his view to include all three of his companions. The "you" in 26:2-4 is singular in Hebrew, but the "you" in 27:5 is plural.

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

"Chapter 26 is one of the grandest recitals in the whole book. It is excelled only by the Lord's speeches, as is fitting. It sounds well in Job's mouth, and ends the dialogue, like the first movement of a symphony, with great crashing chords."¹⁵²

Job began by rebuking Bildad's attitude (26:1-4). Sarcastically he charged Bildad with the same weakness and inability Bildad had attributed to all men (26:2-3). Bildad's words were not profound but quite superficial (26:4).

Next Job picked up the theme of God's greatness that Bildad had introduced (26:5-14). Some commentators have understood this pericope to be the words of Bildad or Zophar. However the lack of textual reference to either Bildad or Zophar, plus the content of the section that is more consistent with Job's words than theirs, makes this an unattractive view.¹⁵³ Job's beautiful description of God's omnipotence in these verses shows that he had a much larger concept of God than Bildad did (cf. 25:3, 5-6).

¹⁵¹Wiersbe, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵²Andersen, p. 216

¹⁵³See *ibid.*

"Departed spirits" (26:5) is literally *rephaim* in Hebrew. The Rephaim, meaning giants, were both the mythical gods and human warlords of ancient Ugaritic (Canaanite) culture. They were the elite, and the Canaanites thought that those of them who had died were the most powerful and worthy of the dead.¹⁵⁴ Job said these trembled "under the waters" (i.e., in Sheol) because they are under God's authority. "Abaddon" is a poetic equivalent for Sheol (cf. 26:6; 28:23; 31:12; Ps. 88:11 margin; Prov. 15:11; 27:20). Job viewed the earth as sustained only by God (26:7). God bottles the rain in clouds, but they do not break (26:8). Probably the circle in view (26:11) is the horizon that appears as a boundary for the sun. The pillars of heaven (26:11) are doubtless the mountains that in one sense appear to hold up the sky. On "Rahab," see my comments on 9:13. The "fleeing serpent" (26:13) is a synonym for Rahab.

"God's power over and knowledge of Sheol, His creation of outer space and the earth, His control of the clouds, His demarcating of the realms of light and darkness, His shaking of the mountains, His quelling of the sea, His destruction of alleged opposing deities—to call these accomplishments the bare outlines or fragmentary sketches of God's activities [26:14] gives an awareness of the vast immensity and incomprehensible infinity of God!"¹⁵⁵

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

Since 27:1 begins, "Then Job continued . . .," Job may have paused and waited for Zophar to respond. However we have no third speech by him in the text. Evidently Job proceeded to elaborate further on Bildad's "wisdom" but broadened his perspective and addressed all three friends. "You" in 27:5, 11, and 12 is plural in the Hebrew text.

Job began by affirming his innocence (27:1-6). For the first time he took an oath that his words were true. "As God lives" means that what he was saying was as certain as God's existence.

In a similar spirit Job wished that his enemies would suffer the fate of the wicked (27:7-23).¹⁵⁶ In so saying Job was claiming that he was on the side of the righteous, and all who were against him were wicked.

"Imprecatory rhetoric is difficult for Westerners to understand. But in the Semitic world it is still an honorable rhetorical device. The imprecation had a juridical function and was frequently a hyperbolic (cf. Ps. 109:6-15; 139 [sic 137]:7-9) means of dealing with false accusations and oppression. Legally the false accusation and the very crimes committed are called down on the perpetrator's head. Since his counselors had falsely accused Job of being wicked, they deserved to be punished like the wicked."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴Conrad L'Heureaux, "The Ugaritic and Biblical Rephaim," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974):265-74.

¹⁵⁵Zuck, *Job*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁶Rowley, p. 175, regarded this section as Zophar's third speech.

¹⁵⁷Smick, "Job," p. 971.

Again Job called upon God. His friends never did, as far as the text records.

Some writers have regarded 27:13-23 as Zophar's third speech.¹⁵⁸ Still this section is consistent with Job's argument in the immediate context (27:7-10) and previously (24:18-25).

"In the following strophe Job now begins as Zophar (ch. xx. 29) concluded. He gives back to the friends the doctrine they have fully imparted to him. They have held the lot of the evil-doer before him as a mirror, that he may behold himself in it and be astounded; he holds it before them, that they may perceive how not only his bearing under suffering, but also the form of his affliction, is of a totally different kind."¹⁵⁹

Job asserted that the wicked would experience punishment eventually. Though he believed God was not being just with him, he could not escape the conviction that God must deal justly. It was this antinomy that made Job so uncomfortably anxious to obtain a reply from God. He agreed with his companions that God punishes the wicked. This is what normally happens in life (27:13-23). Nonetheless he disagreed that this is always true in every case.

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

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

Because the speech in this chapter is more soliloquy than dialogue some scholars have concluded that someone other than Job spoke it: Zophar, Bildad, or God. One writer argued for it's being a speech by none of the characters, but a composition by the storyteller in which he expressed his own point of view.¹⁶⁰ The subject matter, however, is in harmony with what Job had said previously (cf. 9:10-11; 12:13; 17:10; 23:8-10; 26:14). For this reason it seems to me that Job probably spoke these words.

"Chapter 28, a wisdom hymn, may be a kind of interlude which marks the transition between the two major parts of the poetic body—the previous dialogue between Job and his friends, and the forth-coming long discourses by Job (chaps. 29—31), Elihu (chaps. 32—37), and God (chaps. 38—41) which are almost monologues."¹⁶¹

In this chapter Job summarized his stance before God. Rather than being in rebellion against God, as his friends accused, Job claimed that he feared God and sought to depart from evil (v. 28). He continued to follow the instruction he had received while growing up, namely, that people should trust and obey God because He governs the world in

¹⁵⁸E.g., H. L. Ellison, *A Study of Job*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁹Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Job*, 2:72.

¹⁶⁰Andersen, pp. 222-29.

¹⁶¹Parsons, p. 141.

infinite wisdom.¹⁶² The fact that Job believed God was unjust in his case did not mean he had abandoned faith in God completely.

"The internal structure of chapter 28 is as follows:

- Introduction (vv. 1-2): All treasure has a source
- I. First stanza (vv. 3-11): The discovery of treasure
Refrain and response (vv. 12-14): Wisdom is elusive
- II. Second stanza (vv. 15-19): Wisdom as treasure
Refrain and response (vv. 20-22): Wisdom is elusive
- III. Third stanza (vv. 23-27): God and wisdom
- Conclusion (v. 28): The source of wisdom"¹⁶³

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

Verse 5b probably means that mining produces a mixture of rubble just as a fire does.¹⁶⁴ The essence of wisdom is to fear (treat with reverential trust) the Lord (Master) and to depart from evil (v. 28). We know this only by supernatural revelation ("to man He said"). We can never plumb the depths of God's wisdom. However, we can experience wisdom partially as we adore and obey God making Him, rather than self, the center of our lives and allowing Him to regulate our lives.

In this speech Job demonstrated that his understanding of wisdom was greater than that of his three friends. It was a rebuke of their shortsighted wisdom.¹⁶⁵ In chapter 28 Job gave evidence that he did fear God. In chapter 29 he proceeded to give evidence that he also turned away from evil. Consequently 28:28 is a hinge and connecting link. It is also "one of the great climactic moments in the Book."¹⁶⁶

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

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

¹⁶²Robert Laurin, "The Theological Structure of Job," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):86-89.

¹⁶³Smick, "Architectonics, Structured . . .," p. 91.

¹⁶⁴Rowley, p. 228.

¹⁶⁵Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 463.

¹⁶⁶Reichert, p. 145.

Job's past blessedness ch. 29

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

- "Blessing, vv. 2-6
- Honor, vv. 7-11
- Job's benevolence, vv. 12-17
- Blessing, vv. 18-20
- Honor, vv. 21-25 . . .

"Job in asserting his benevolence places a description of it in the climatic position in this oration, with the key line (v. 14) in the exact middle of the poem."¹⁶⁷

We may divide this chapter into two sections. In verses 1-11 Job longed for the former days, and in verses 12-25 he explained why he had enjoyed them. His fellowship with God evidently meant most to him since he mentioned this blessing first (vv. 2-5a). Butter and oil (v. 6) were symbols of prosperity. The rock (v. 6b) may refer to an olive press or perhaps to the rocky soil out of which olive trees grew. Unlike God's present treatment of him Job had assisted the injured and had punished oppressors (v. 17). Most translators have rendered the Hebrew word *hol* at the end of verse 18 "sand," but one writer argued that it refers to the mythical phoenix bird.¹⁶⁸ Job had also provided encouragement and comfort for the despondent (vv. 24-25) in contrast to his friends.

"Job's review of his life [in this chapter] is one of the most important documents in Scripture for the study of Israelite ethics."¹⁶⁹

Job's present misery ch. 30

"Chapter 29 speaks of what the Lord gave to Job and chapter 30 speaks of what the Lord took away (cf. 1:21)."¹⁷⁰

He was presently without respect (vv. 1-15), disregarded (vv. 16-23), and despondent (vv. 24-31). He had formerly enjoyed the respect of the most respectable, but now he experienced the contempt of the most contemptible (vv. 1-15; cf. 29:8, 21-25).¹⁷¹

"The lengthy description of these good-for-nothing fathers is a special brand of rhetoric. The modern Western mind prefers understatement, so when Semitic literature indulges in overstatement, such hyperbole becomes a mystery to the average Western reader. To define every facet of

¹⁶⁷Smick, "Architectonics, Structured . . .," pp. 92-93.

¹⁶⁸Henry Heras, "The Standard of Job's Immortality," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (1949):263-79.

¹⁶⁹Andersen, p. 230.

¹⁷⁰Zuck, *Job*, p. 129.

¹⁷¹Andersen, p. 235.

their debauchery, to state it in six different ways, is not meant to glory in it but to heighten the pathetic nature of his dishonor."¹⁷²

God loosed His bowstring against Job (v. 11a) by shooting an arrow at him (i.e., by afflicting him). Job's enemies cast off the figurative bridle that had previously restrained them in their contacts with him (v. 11b). Job described his soul as poured out within him (v. 16) in the sense that he felt drained of all zest for life.¹⁷³ Verse 18 probably means he felt that God was grabbing him by the lapels, so to speak, or perhaps that his sickness had discolored, rather than disheveled, his clothing. Verse 28 evidently refers to Job's emotional state whereas verse 30 refers to his physical condition even though the Hebrew words translated "mourning" and "black" are similar in meaning. The Hebrew words translated "comfort" and "fever" are also very close together in meaning. Job's mental anguish exceeded his physical agony.

Job's continuing innocence ch. 31

As was common in ancient Near Eastern judicial cases, Job concluded his summary defense with an oath of innocence. He did so in the form of a negative confession complete with self-imprecations.¹⁷⁴ He concluded with a challenge to God to present His charges in writing (vv. 35-37). Job's idea was that if God remained silent this would be a vindication of his innocence. However if he had been guilty, God would have to intervene and impose the punishment Job had designated.¹⁷⁵ Note the frequent repetition of the phrase, "If I have . . ." and its equivalents.

"Chapter 31 as to its literary format is a negative testament by which Job will close the matter of whether he is being punished for his sins. After such a statement, in the jurisprudence of the ancient Near East, the burden of proof fell on the court. That is why verse 40 says, 'The words of Job are ended.' Each disavowal had to be accompanied by an oath that called for the same punishment the offense deserved on the basis of the principle of *lex talionis* (vv. 5-10). Because the charges against Job were wide and varied, he must give a similarly wide disavowal. He had already done this in a general way (cf. 23:10-12), but now he specifies and calls for condemnation and punishment from both God and man (vv. 8, 11, 12, 14, 22, 23) if he is guilty of any of these sins."¹⁷⁶

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

¹⁷²Smick, "Architectonics, Structured . . .," p. 93.

¹⁷³Pope, p. 222.

¹⁷⁴Parsons, p. 141. Cf. Michael Brennan Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979):42, 47.

¹⁷⁵Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 164.

¹⁷⁶Smick, "Architectonics, Structured . . .," p. 94.

"The making of a covenant with his eyes is not merely a promise not to lust after a girl. The sin he has in mind is far more fundamental, or it would not have commanded this position in the poem. Job is emphatically denying an insidious and widespread form of idolatry: devotion to the *betula*, 'the maiden,' the goddess of fertility. This Venus of the Semitic world was variously known as the Maiden Anat in Ugaritic, Ashtoreth in preexilic Israel, and Ishtar in Babylonian sources, wherein she is described as 'laden with vitality, charm and voluptuousness.' She is probably the 'Queen of Heaven' mentioned in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:16-19."¹⁷⁷

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

"As a consequence of his suffering, Job viewed man's relationship to God as being based on God's sovereign caprice; therefore man could hope for happiness only by adhering to an ethical rightness superior to God's whereby he could demand vindication (Job 31; cf. 35:2b)."¹⁷⁸

Verse 10 has in view Job's wife grinding corn with a hard millstone, the work of a slave, and being overpowered by men sexually.

"His hypothetical adultery would in Hebrew eyes be an offence against her husband, and so another's adultery with his wife would be a similar offence against him. In Hebrew law adultery always involved a married woman. The marital state of the man was immaterial."¹⁷⁹

Job's words about adultery (vv. 9-12) are classic and reveal righteous abhorrence of that sin. Likewise his statements regarding the importance of treating slaves as human beings (vv. 13-15) reveal Job's fear of God and love for his fellowman. He respected human life highly (vv. 16-23). Job further claimed that he was not an idolater (vv. 24-28), selfish (vv. 29-32), or hypocritical (vv. 33-34).

"Here then is either a very clean conscience or a very calloused one."¹⁸⁰

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

"An examination of biblical and extra-biblical legal documents establishes v. 35 as a dependent's official appeal before a third party for a civil hearing at which the judge would compel the plaintiff to formalize his

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷⁸Parsons, p. 144.

¹⁷⁹Rowley, p. 200.

¹⁸⁰Andersen, p. 244.

accusations and to present any supporting evidence. As we shall see, this request was ordinarily made only after all attempts at informal arbitration had been exhausted and was often accompanied by a sworn statement of innocence. In Job 31 the oath of innocence has been expanded to embrace the entire chapter.¹⁸¹

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

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

F. ELIHU'S SPEECHES CHS. 32—37

Many critical scholars believe that a later editor inserted chapters 32—37 in the text of Job.¹⁸² Most conservatives believe there is ample external and internal evidence indicating that this section of chapters fits into the argument of the book.

". . . the Elihu speeches (chaps. 32—37), which seemingly interrupt the argument of the book, actually set the stage for the Yahweh speeches. Elihu appears as a type of mediator (an impartial witness) who speaks on behalf of God (36:2) by rebuking the three friends (cf. 32:3, 6-14; 34:2-15; cf. 35:4) and by suggesting that Job needed to repent of his pride which developed because of his suffering (cf. 33:17; 35:12-16). He recommended that Job should exalt God's works which are evident in nature (36:24—37:18) and fear Him who comes in golden splendor out of the north (37:22-24). These basic ideas of Elihu are either assumed or developed by the Lord in His speeches."¹⁸³

1. The introduction of Elihu 32:1-5

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

¹⁸¹Dick, p. 38.

¹⁸²See William Ewart Staples, *The Speeches of Elihu: A Study of Job XXXII-XXXVII*, pp. 12-24, and David Noel Freedman, "The Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job," *Harvard Theological Review* 61:1 (January 1968):51-59, for support of this view, and John Peter Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 4. *Chronicles-Job*, pp. 268-73, for a summary of the arguments with rebuttals. See also Larry J. Waters, "The Authenticity of the Elihu Speeches in Job 32—37," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):28-41.

¹⁸³Parsons, p. 141.

Elihu may have been a relative of Abraham since a man named Buz was a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother (Gen. 22:20-21), and Elihu was a Buzite (cf. Jer. 25:23). A man named Ram (v. 2) was an ancestor of David (Ruth 4:19-22).

Elihu was angry. The writer mentioned his burning anger four times in these verses (vv. 2 [twice], 3, 5). He was angry with Job because Job considered himself right and God wrong. This is the meaning of "he justified himself before God" (v. 5). Furthermore he was angry with Job's three companions because they had failed to prove Job worthy of God's punishment (v. 3).¹⁸⁴

2. Elihu's first speech 32:6—33:33

Before Elihu began presenting his views (ch. 33), he first had to gain the attention of his elders and explain why he wanted to speak (32:6-22).

Elihu's reasons for speaking 32:6-22

Elihu began by voicing his respect for Job's three friends (vv. 6-10). They were older than he, and for this reason he said he had refrained from speaking until now. However he had become convinced that advancing age does not always bring wisdom with it. Rather, wisdom comes from God. "A spirit in man" and "the breath of the Almighty" (v. 8) evidently refer to the Spirit of God (cf. Gen. 41:38-39; Exod. 31:3; Num. 27:18-21; Isa. 11:2; Dan. 5:11-12). Elihu was saying that Job's three friends were not wise. To get them to listen in spite of what he had just said he asked ten times that they pay attention to his words (vv. 10, 20; 33:1, 12, 31, 33; 34:2, 10, 16; 37:14).

"Almost all modern interpreters have found Elihu to be insufferably wordy. . . . This loquacious style to some degree makes all the speeches in chapter 3—41 difficult for the modern reader to appreciate."¹⁸⁵

"His professed modesty is belied by his self-importance and pomposity."¹⁸⁶

The ancients in the Near Eastern world esteemed rhetoric and elaborate wording.

Elihu proceeded to evaluate these three men further (vv. 11-14). They had failed to refute Job. They believed they were right and that since Job had failed to repent God was the only Person who could convince him that he was a sinner (v. 13). However, Job had not refuted Elihu who planned to use different arguments to persuade his hearers (v. 14).

Finally, Elihu explained to Job why he wanted to speak (vv. 15-22). Among other reasons he was going to talk because his elders had fallen silent. The "spirit within" (v. 18) Elihu was probably his own human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, in view of what follows (vv. 19-20).

¹⁸⁴H. D. Beeby, "Elihu—Job's Mediator." *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 7:2 (October 1965):33-54, suggested that Elihu served as a covenant mediator between Job and God (cf. 9:33; 16:19-22; 19:21).

¹⁸⁵Smick, "Job," p. 1002.

¹⁸⁶Rowley, p. 207.

Elihu's first response to Job ch. 33

This whole speech is an attempt to explain to Job why God was not responding to him. Elihu was very wordy, which he admitted in 32:18. In summary, he told Job that God was not silent, as Job had charged, but that He was speaking through dreams and sickness to the patriarch. Rather than using suffering to punish Job for his sins, God was using it to prevent him from dying. Elihu said God was being merciful to Job. The three counselors had said the purpose of suffering was punitive. Job's wife before them had said Job was suffering because God was unfair. Now Elihu offered a third solution: God was trying to teach Job something. He said the purpose of suffering is pedagogical, educational.

Verses 1-7 record Elihu's request that Job hear him out. "Yourselves" in verse 5 should read "yourself." Elihu next summarized what Job had said (vv. 8-13). He explained that God spoke in dreams and visions (vv. 14-18) and through pain (vv. 19-28). Job had had dreams (7:14) that, Elihu suggested, should keep Job from improper actions and attitudes, specifically, pride that would be sinful and would lead to his death (33:17). In sickness and pain God brings people closer to death. This leads them to evaluate their lives and, if they respond properly, to grow in their relationship with God.

"God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."¹⁸⁷

The angels are God's agents in bringing both sickness and restoration to people (v. 23; cf. 5:1; 9:33). The "ransom" (v. 24) probably refers to the sick person's repentance. Seeing the light (v. 28) means being kept alive. Verses 29-33 summarize Elihu's argument.

"Unfortunately like so many well-meaning messengers of grace, Elihu was so fully convinced of his good intentions toward Job that he became insufferably overbearing."¹⁸⁸

"Elihu did, however, perceive the significance of the all-important principle of God's free grace, which the others had slighted."¹⁸⁹

Elihu's views contrasted with those of the three friends as follows.

THREE FRIENDS	ELIHU
Sin leads to suffering.	Suffering leads to sin.
Suffering is retributive.	Suffering is protective
Suffering is punitive.	Suffering is educational.
Job should repent.	Job should learn.
Job should initiate restoration.	God had initiated restoration.

¹⁸⁷C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁸Smick, "Job," p. 1007.

¹⁸⁹Kline, p. 483.

Who was correct? Other Scriptures indicate that God uses suffering both to punish sinners and to produce spiritual growth. In some cases He may have one purpose in view and in other cases the other. On the other hand both Elihu and the three friends were wrong in some of what they said. Job was not a great sinner, and God sometimes intervenes personally and directly in human experience.

3. Elihu's second speech ch. 34

Elihu sought to refute Job's charge that God was unjust in this speech. He tried to answer Job's question, "Why doesn't God have mercy on me?" He first addressed the three friends (vv. 10-15, plural "you" in Hebrew) and then spoke to Job (vv. 16-27, singular "you"). In his first speech Elihu had alluded to Eliphaz's arguments. In this one he took up Bildad's (vv. 2, 34).

Job's plea of innocence 34:1-9

Elihu reminded the three older counselors that Job had claimed to be innocent of transgressions (cf. 13:18, 23; 14:17; 23:11; 27:2, 6). Then he sided with them and agreed that Job was guilty of sin for which God could punish him justly.

Elihu's defense of God's justice 34:10-37

As the three friends, Elihu believed God was acting perfectly justly in allowing Job to suffer and that Job was insolent to accuse God of being unjust (v. 10). He then reviewed God's character to illustrate His justice (vv. 11-30).

"Elihu [in vv. 10-15] repeats the self-evident truth that God can do no wrong. He attaches three thoughts to this proposition. First, he infers from God's supremacy as Creator that He is not accountable to anyone (13). This takes us to the edge of a dangerous cliff. For, if everything God does is right, by definition, and if, because He is Sovereign, God does everything that happens, it follows that everything that happens is right, and the category of evil disappears. Secondly, verses 14 and 15 specify that every living thing depends on God for its being, so that He may, indiscriminately or universally, withdraw this gift of existence and do nothing wrong. This is a fine acknowledgment of God as owner of all, and a fine tribute to His might. But it leaves no grounds for saying that any act of God is 'good' rather than 'bad'. 'Might makes right' is the upshot of Elihu's doctrine, and in this emphasis he approaches rather closely to Job's contention. But he wriggles out of the difficulty by falling back on the doctrine that God requites every person according to his behaviour (11), stating it in crass individualistic terms. But this is the very thing under debate, and no answer to the problem."¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰Andersen, p. 253.

Elihu asserted that God was not answerable to anyone including Job (vv. 31-37; cf. v. 13). In this section Elihu became very brutal (cf. vv. 33, 36). Some sin that Job had committed had brought on his suffering, Elihu concluded, but Job's consequent rebellion against God made him doubly guilty (v. 37).

Much of what Elihu said in this speech was true. Nevertheless, as the other critics, he incorrectly assumed Job was lying about his innocence. As we know from the first two chapters, Job was not suffering because he had sinned.

"In Israel the ban on idols placed restrictions on the decorative visual arts. The prohibition of ritualized myths was another part of the campaign against paganism and prevented the development of drama in Israel. As a result the prime media for artistic expression were music, with song and dance, and the spoken word. In all these Israel excelled. Nothing was esteemed more highly than a word fitly spoken (Pr. 25:11). It was savoured by the ear *as the palate tastes food* (Jb. 34:3). Such art could easily become decadent, when the form was prized for its own sake, rather than as an expression of truth. Elihu's speeches tend to come under this condemnation."¹⁹¹

4. Elihu's third speech ch. 35

We could chart the differences in Elihu's first three speeches this way.

Elihu's Speech	Job's question that Elihu answered	Job's charge that Elihu refuted
First	Why doesn't God respond to me?	God is insensitive (ch. 33).
Second	Why doesn't God relieve me?	God is unjust (ch. 34).
Third	Why doesn't God reward me?	Holiness is unprofitable (ch. 35).

Job felt God should have rewarded him for his innocence rather than subjecting him to suffering. Elihu replied that man's sin or innocence does not affect God, and God was silent to Job because Job was proud. As before, Elihu first quoted Job (vv. 1-3) and then refuted his statement (vv. 4-16).

Job's position of indifference 35:1-3

Job had said that living a righteous life does not benefit a person since God does not consistently bless the righteous and punish the wicked in this life (9:30-31; cf. 34:9; 35:3). Elihu thought this assertion was hardly a sign of Job's innocence. In verse 2 "more than God's" is clearer if we read "before God." "You" in verse 3 probably refers to any person (impersonal "you") rather than God.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 251.

Elihu's defense of God's freedom 35:4-16

Elihu made two responses to what he inferred was Job's attitude. First, he claimed that God is under no obligation to react to people's actions be they good or bad. He is free to respond or not respond as He chooses. God is above the human sphere of life and only reacts to people when He chooses to do so. This is a thought Eliphaz had expressed earlier (22:2-3, 12). However, Elihu went further by pointing out that people's actions do affect other people (vv. 4-8). Therefore, there is an advantage to being holy.

"There is no place in Elihu's theology for doing God's will out of love for him. Man affects only his fellow man by being good or bad (v. 9). And though God may punish or reward man as Judge, there is no place for him in the role of a Father who can be hurt or pleased by man."¹⁹²

Second, Elihu spoke to the fact that God does not always provide relief when the oppressed pray to Him (vv. 9-16; cf. 24:12; 36:13). He said often these prayers for help spring from a selfish, proud motive rather than from a sincere desire to learn the reason for one's sufferings. In this respect humans are like animals; we do not ask for this knowledge. Since God may not answer selfish prayers, it is understandable that He was silent in response to Job's arrogant, impatient petitions. Elihu counseled Job to wait for God to answer rather than becoming frantic.

"Job would get his just deserts in due time."¹⁹³

"It is always possible to think of a reason for unanswered prayer. The trite explanation, which we hear all too often, is that 'You didn't have enough faith', or 'You prayed from the wrong motive', or 'You must have some hidden, unconfessed sin'. This diagnosis is always applicable. Everyone who prays is aware of the weakness of his faith; everyone with a scrap of self-knowledge knows that his motives are always mixed; everyone who searches his conscience can find no end of fresh sins to be dealt with. If no prayers could be offered and none answered, until all these conditions were satisfied, none would ever be offered and none answered. The Elihus of this world do not care about the cruelty of their perfectionist advice and its unreality. Their theory is saved; that is what matters."¹⁹⁴

5. Elihu's fourth speech chs. 36—37

Of all Elihu's discourses this one is the most impressive because of his lofty descriptions of God.

"This concluding statement contains Elihu's best and most distinctive ideas. Up until now he has been treading on familiar and conventional

¹⁹²Smick, "Job," p. 1016.

¹⁹³Habel, p. 189.

¹⁹⁴Andersen, p. 257.

ground, repeating largely the ideas which Job and his friends have already expressed. The harsh tone that Elihu had adopted in his second and third speeches is here softened. Job 36:1-21 is a more mature and engaging statement of orthodox theology than anything found elsewhere in the book.¹⁹⁵

God's dealings with man 36:1-26

The first four verses of chapter 36 introduce this speech. In them Elihu again urged Job to pay attention to what he would say. He claimed that his words were true and that he himself was "perfect in knowledge" (v. 4).

"In his defence [*sic*] of the righteousness of God, Elihu now develops his thought on the disciplinary meaning of suffering. God is great, but he does not despise men. The incorrigibly wicked he does not preserve, but in mercy he afflicts the righteous that they may be cleansed of all sin and pride."¹⁹⁶

Four times in this chapter and twice in this section (vv. 1-25) Elihu said, "Behold" (vv. 5, 22, 26, 30). In each case he then proceeded to say something important about God. After this, he applied that truth.

Elihu's first affirmation was that God is mighty and merciful (vv. 5-10), and He uses suffering to instruct people. There are two possible responses to God's teaching: hearing (v. 11) and not hearing (v. 12), and each has consequences. Elihu developed these responses and consequences further, first the response of the godless (vv. 13-14) and then that of the godly (vv. 15-16). Essentially the godless become angry and refuse to turn to God for help, and this often leads to a life of shame and an untimely death (vv. 13-14). The righteous who suffer, on the other hand, turn to God, submit to His instruction, learn from it, and live (v. 15). Finally Elihu applied these points to Job and warned him against responding to his sufferings like the ungodly (vv. 16-21). Specifically, Job should avoid anger and scoffing and not let the large price he was paying for his God-sent education (the "ransom," v. 18) divert him from godly living.

Elihu's next major declaration about God, introduced by the second "Behold" (v. 22), was that He is a sovereign and supremely wise teacher (vv. 22-23). Elihu's application to Job was that he should worship God rather than murmuring, complaining, and pitying himself (vv. 24-25). Worship would enable him to learn the lessons that God was teaching him.

Note the introverted (chiastic) structure of verses 22-26 that emphasizes the fact that God is worthy of praise.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁹⁶Rowley, p. 227.

"Elihu has, in fact, steered the argument away from the justice of God to His wisdom, using His power as the bridge."¹⁹⁷

God's dealings with nature 36:27—37:24

Elihu focused next on God's activities in nature. There may be reference to autumn conditions in 36:27-33, winter in 37:1-13, and summer in 37:17-18.¹⁹⁸

Elihu's third "Behold" (36:26) draws attention to the infinite wisdom of God. No one can understand how or why He deals with nature as He does (36:29).

The fourth "Behold" (36:30) affirms a similar point. God uses rain to bring both blessings and curses on people. Lightning and thunder declare God's presence even if people cannot fully understand when or why they come as they do.

Having introduced the idea of God's sovereign control over all things as reflected in His control of nature (36:26-33), Elihu elaborated on these thoughts in chapter 37. In verses 1-13 he cited more examples of God's working in nature that we cannot comprehend fully (37:5). We can learn that these things are His work (37:7) for several different purposes. Sometimes God does them for people's benefit or harm, but sometimes He does them simply for the sake of His world (37:13).

At this point Elihu turned again to apply these truths to Job's situation (37:14-24). He urged Job to be humble before such a great God (37:14-20). No one can find Him, but we can count on Him to be just (37:21-23). Job also needed to fear God (37:24).

". . . fear is a normal human emotion and there is nothing wrong with it. We use the fear of sickness, injury, or death to teach children to wash their hands, stay away from power lines, and look carefully before crossing the street. Fear of financial loss motivates people to buy insurance, and fear of death encourages them to have an annual physical checkup.

"Fear of death (and the judgment that follows) is a legitimate motive for trusting Jesus Christ and being saved."¹⁹⁹

Verse 21 may mean that a person cannot look directly at the sun when the sky is clear of clouds. The implication is that neither can we see God in all His glory; He is partially unknowable.

Verse 22 seems to be another allusion to Ugaritic mythology. The Canaanites thought their gods lived in the North, but Elihu said the true God comes out of the North in golden majesty (lit. gold), perhaps like the sun. Since the sun does not rise in the North this cannot be a description of sunrise as symbolic of God's appearing. Rather it may contrast the appearing of the true God with Baal's supposed appearing.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Andersen, p. 262.

¹⁹⁸Zuck, *Job*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁹Wiersbe, p. 37.

²⁰⁰Cf. Pope, pp. 286-87.

In his four speeches Elihu introduced a different reason for suffering: God has things to teach people that they can only learn through pain. He also described God in terms that suggest he may have had a more realistic, fuller concept of God than Job's three friends did. Notwithstanding neither Elihu nor the other three men had adequate insight into Job's situation. They could not have had unless God revealed to them what had transpired in His heavenly courts (chs. 1—2). Elihu's words are closer to the truth and prepare for God's fuller special revelation of Himself that follows in chapters 38—42. Generally Elihu emphasized the positive aspects of God's character whereas the three comforters emphasized the negative aspects. Elihu saw God more as a teacher. The other men spoke of Him as a judge.

"Worshippers of the ancient Near Eastern gods, Satan, Job, and his three antagonists—all these believed that suffering originated from a 'tit for tat,' 'measure for measure,' compensation theology, which governs the correspondence between righteous behavior and prosperity, and sinful behavior and misery. However, Elihu showed that neither he nor God supported this theory. Under God's justice, suffering comes to people for several reasons, many of which are unrelated to compensation theology."²⁰¹

G. THE CYCLE OF SPEECHES BETWEEN JOB AND GOD CHS. 38:1—42:6

Finally, God spoke to Job and gave revelation that Job had been demanding for so long (cf. 13:22; 31:35). There was now no need for the middleman that Job had requested who could mediate between them (cf. 9:33; 16:19). Yahweh spoke directly to Job, and Job had the opportunity to respond directly to God.

"God challenged both Satan and Job by confronting them with his wondrous works. And since Job himself is the divine work by which Satan was challenged, it is through the success of this challenge to Job that God perfects the triumph of his challenge to Satan."²⁰²

What God did not say to Job is as surprising as what He did say. He did not mention Job's suffering, He gave no explanation of the problem of evil, and He did not defend Himself against Job's charge of injustice. God simply revealed Himself to Job and his companions to a greater degree than they had known, and that greater revelation dissolved their difficulties.

"The reader is told why Job was suffering in the Prologue, but that is to show that Job was innocent. Job was never told this; had he been told, the book would immediately lose its message to all other sufferers. So the book is teaching us through the divine theophany that there is something more fundamental than an intellectual solution to the mystery of innocent

²⁰¹Larry J. Waters, "Elihu's Theology and His View of Suffering," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):158.

²⁰²Kline, p. 486.

suffering. Though the message reaches Job through his intellect, it is for his spirit.²⁰³

"To Elihu the suffering may bring enrichment; to the author of the book of Job it is the presence of God that is enriching, and that presence is given to men of integrity and piety in prosperity and in adversity alike."²⁰⁴

". . . whereas the advice of Elihu is to learn his lessons that his prosperity may be restored, the effect of the Divine speeches is to make Job realize that he may have the Divine fellowship in his sufferings, and not merely when he has been delivered from them."²⁰⁵

God's role in His speeches was not that of the defendant on trial whom prosecutor Job was charging with injustice. Rather He was the prosecutor who was asking the questions of Job, the defendant. He asked him more than 70 unanswerable questions and proved him both ignorant and impotent.²⁰⁶ Since Job could not understand or determine God's ways with nature, he obviously could not comprehend or control God's dealings with people.

"In the end the point is that Job cannot have the knowledge to make the assessments he made. It is wiser to bow in submission and adoration of God than to try to judge him."²⁰⁷

1. God's first speech 38:1—40:2

God's first speech "transcends all other descriptions of the wonders of creation or the greatness of the Creator, which are to be found either in the Bible or elsewhere."²⁰⁸

God's introductory challenge to Job 38:1-3

God sometimes made His self-revelations to people in a storm symbolic of the disturbing effects His awesome presence produced (cf. Exod. 19:16-17; 1 Kings 19:11-13; 2 Kings 2:1, 11; Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 1:4; Zech. 9:14). One wonders if Job's friends thought God was about to strike Job dead with a bolt of lightning.

"Job's troubles began when a great wind killed his children (1:19). The Lord was in that storm, and now He speaks from the tempest (cf. Ezk. 1:4)."²⁰⁹

God began His speech with a challenge to His opponent's understanding, as the five human debaters on earth had done. He accused Job of clouding the truth about Him by

²⁰³Smick, "Job," p. 1029.

²⁰⁴Rowley, pp. 20-21.

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 229.

²⁰⁶Wiersbe, pp. 23 and 76, found 77 questions that God asked Job in chapters 38—41.

²⁰⁷The NET Bible note on 38:1.

²⁰⁸Samuel R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 427.

²⁰⁹Andersen, p. 273.

saying things that were not true. Job should have defended God's justice rather than denying it since he claimed to be God's friend. His lack of adequate revelation led to this error. Likewise every believer should be slow to affirm that he knows God's will about the affairs of an individual's life, his own or someone else's. We still do not know all the facts concerning why God is allowing what takes place. God then told Job to prepare for a difficult job: to explain His ways in nature. If God had done wrong, Job must have known what was right!

God's questions of Job 38:4—39:30

As Job's friends had done, God began to break Job down blow by verbal blow. Finally all his pride was gone. However where Job's friends had failed, God succeeded.

"The function of the questions needs to be properly understood. As a rhetorical device, a question can be another way of making a pronouncement, much favoured by orators. For Job, the questions in the Lord's speeches are not such roundabout statements of fact; they are invitations, suggestions about discoveries he will make as he tries to find his own answers. They are not catechetical, as if Job's knowledge is being tested. They are educative, in the true and original meaning of that term. Job is led out into the world. The questions are rhetorical only in the sense that none of them has any answer ventured by Job. But this is not because the questions have no answers. Their initial effect of driving home to Job his ignorance is not intended to humiliate him. On the contrary the highest nobility of every person is to be thus enrolled by God Himself in His school of Wisdom. And the schoolroom is the world! For Job the exciting discoveries to which God leads him bring a giant advance in knowledge, knowledge of himself and of God, for the two always go together in the Bible."²¹⁰

God gave Job an oral science examination covering aspects of cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, astronomy, and zoology.

He began with the origin of the earth (38:4-7). God's point was that since Job was absent when He had created the earth he lacked information that God had and that enabled Him to govern the earth better than Job could. The phrase "sons of God" (v. 7) evidently refers to the angels (cf. 1:6; Ps. 148:2-3). The "morning stars" may be stars or planets God created before the earth. Nevertheless it seems more likely that they, too, are angels since there is synonymous parallelism in this verse.

God next asked Job about the origin of the oceans (38:8-11). Obviously Job had nothing to do with this major aspect of God's creative activity, so his knowledge again proved inferior.²¹¹

Job had no experience causing the sun to rise and thereby sustaining the earth either (38:12-15). The rising sun shakes the wicked out of the ends of the earth (38:13) in the

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 269.

²¹¹See Hans-Jurgen Hermission, "Observation on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, pp. 52-54.

sense that the wicked love darkness rather than light (cf. John 3:19). The "light" of the wicked (38:15), that element in which they flourish, is darkness. By causing the sun to rise God withholds the darkness, their "light," and so frustrates (breaks) their work. Another interpretation holds that this verse (38:15) may be an ironic statement saying that God does not break the wicked but only controls them.

Even though "the dawn of every day provides an occasion to punish the wicked . . . this possibility is not in practice realized and is therefore not in the plan of the world."²¹²

"Although a major thrust of the Lord's speeches (38:1—40:2; 40:6—41:34) was to polemicize against all potential rivals to His lordship over the cosmos, there is also a subtle refutation of the dogma of divine retribution. Although granting that the control of chaotic forces of evil (which in some instances is inherent in the design of the universe—38:12-15) is somewhat consistent with the principle of divine retribution, God demonstrates that the universe is not always geared to this principle."²¹³

Job was likewise ignorant of the springs of the sea, the gates of death, and the scope of the earth (38:16-18) none of which he had seen. Nor had he knowledge of where the light (sun) went when it apparently set or where the darkness came from and went at sunset and sunrise (38:19-20). Verse 21 presents Yahweh as a master of sarcasm.

The next subject on God's quiz was the weather (38:22-38). "Light" (38:24) may refer to "lightning." The "channel for the flood" appears to be the "path" through the sky that rain takes on its way to the earth (38:25).

Yahweh referred to the constellations to impress Job's lack of insight and his impotence on the patriarch further (38:31-33; cf. 9:9).

Next God turned to the animal world and pointed out six beasts and four birds only one of which was evidently a domesticated creature in Job's day: the horse (38:39—39:30). They include "the ferocious, the helpless, the shy, the strong, the bizarre, the wild."²¹⁴ They illustrate God's creative genius and his providential care. The animal world exists for partially unknown reasons, not merely to meet the needs of humankind. People cannot explain why animals live as they do. This is another mystery that only God understands fully.

Animals	References	Questions
Lion and raven	38:39-41	How do they get food?
Goat and deer	39:1-4	How do they bear young?
Donkey and ox	39:5-12	How are they tamed?
Ostrich and horse	39:13-25	Why do they act strangely?
Hawk and vulture	39:26-30	How do they fly?

²¹²Matitiahu Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966):99.

²¹³Parsons, p. 145.

²¹⁴Zuck, *Job*, p. 170.

One writer wrote the following about the wild ox (or aurochs, 39:9-12).

"Extinct since 1627, this enormous animal was the most powerful of all hooved beasts, exceeded in size only by the hippopotamus and elephant."²¹⁵

God's point in asking Job to consider each of these animals was this. Even upon careful examination there are many things about their individual characteristics, behavior, and life that people simply cannot explain. That is still true today. For reasons unknown to Job God allowed each animal to experience what was His will for that one. Just so, he permits every human being to experience what he or she does for reasons partially unknown to us. Only Yahweh is powerful enough and wise enough to do this.

"A main function of the Lord's speeches is to show the absurdity of Job's attempt to manipulate God by a 'lawsuit,' which assumed that his relationship to God is a juridical one."²¹⁶

God rarely used legal metaphors, which Job had employed so often, in His speeches to Job. From now on Job stopped using them. This is an important observation because it shows that the basis of Job and God's relationship was not a legal one, as Job had assumed. A legal relationship requires equal compensation by both parties for what each of them has done to the other. The basis of God's dealings with Job was gracious, not legal (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7).

God's concluding challenge to Job 40:1-2

God's first speech began and ended with a challenge to Job. Job had found fault with God for allowing him to suffer when he was godly. He had said he wished he could meet God in court to face Him with His injustice and to hear His response (13:3, 15). Now God asked Job if he still wanted to contend with Him after God had reminded him of His power and wisdom. "It" (40:2b) may refer to the question in 40:2a, though it could refer to all the evidence God had presented in chapters 38—39.²¹⁷

"Yahweh ironically challenged Job to teach (or correct) Him in the matters of the universe to prove that he was equal to God and thus capable of arguing with God in court."²¹⁸

2. Job's first reply to God 40:3-5

Earlier in the book Job had hesitated to confront God (9:14). Gradually he became more confident and demanded an audience with God (13:22a). Still later he spoke almost as

²¹⁵Andersen, p. 281. See Zuck, *Job*, pp. 171-74, and George Cansdale, *Animals of Bible Lands*, for more information about these animals.

²¹⁶Parsons, pp. 149-50.

²¹⁷Reichert, p. 209.

²¹⁸Parsons, p. 150.

God's equal boasting that he would approach God as a prince (31:37). Now having discovered his own "insignificance" (40:4) he had nothing more to say to God (40:5). God had humbled him. Job felt no need to speak more since he had repeated himself earlier (40:5; cf. 33:14). However, Job did not confess any sin. Therefore God proceeded to speak again. He, not Job, found it necessary to speak "even twice" (40:5).

3. God's second speech 40:6—41:34

This second divine discourse is similar to, yet different from, the first. It began as the first one did with a challenge to Job (40:6-14; cf. 38:1-3), but it did not end with one (cf. 40:1-2). In the first speech Yahweh spoke of His inanimate creation and of His animate creation, specifically 10 animals. In the second speech He concentrated on only two creatures: Behemoth and Leviathan.

"The second speech is not a mere afterthought about two creatures left out of the first speech. Here God accomplishes more than in the first speech, where He merely humbled Job by showing him how He is Creator and Sustainer of the natural world. Now He will convince Job He is also Lord of the moral order, one whose justice Job cannot discredit. And appropriately Job's response this time is repentance (42:1-6)."²¹⁹

"In spite of its aggressive tone, this speech is not really a contradiction of anything that Job has said. In many respects it is very close to his own thought, and endorses his sustained contention that justice must be left to God. But it brings Job to the end of his quest by convincing him that he may and must hand the whole matter over completely to God more trustingly, less fretfully. And do it without insisting that God should first answer all his questions and give him a formal acquittal.

"Here, if we have rightly found the heart of the theology of the whole book, is a very great depth. There is a rebuke in it for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses."²²⁰

God's challenge 40:6-14

God introduced this challenge much the same as He did His first, out of the whirlwind, and with a demand that Job refute Him if he could.

Job had claimed God was unjust. In answering this challenge God did not argue with Job. He simply asked Job questions that made it obvious to Job that he was unable to do what he had blamed God for not doing. In criticizing God Job had placed himself in a position over God. Therefore God now reminded Job that he was not superior or even equal to

²¹⁹Smick, "Architectonics, Structural . . .," p. 99.

²²⁰Andersen, p. 287.

God (vv. 9, 11-13). If he were superior or equal, Job could deliver himself from his own misery, which he could not do (v. 14). Because Job was inferior to God, he had no right to criticize God for behaving as He did (cf. Rom. 9:20).

It may be that God used the Hebrew word translated "gird up your loins" in a forensic sense in 38:3 and 40:7 to heighten the irony of His interrogation.²²¹

God's questions 40:15—41:34

Yahweh's purpose in directing Job's attention to such inexplicable animals on land (Behemoth) and in the water (Leviathan) seems to have been almost the same as His purpose in His first speech. He intended to humble Job by reminding him of his very limited power and wisdom compared with God's so Job would trust and obey Him.

Scholars disagree on the question of whether the Behemoth and Leviathan that the writer described here were real or mythological creatures. Some of the descriptions, if taken literally, could hardly refer to real animals that are alive today (e.g., 41:18-22). Nevertheless this is poetic literature and these descriptions may be figurative, specifically, hyperbole (overstatement to emphasize one or more characteristics, similar to a caricature).

"Our poet can hardly write a line without including a simile, a habit which many critics censure as artistic over-kill."²²²

Those who prefer the mythological monster interpretation do so mainly because Leviathan almost certainly describes a mythical creature in 3:8, Psalms 74:14, and Isaiah 27:1, and perhaps elsewhere in Scripture. Also the description of Leviathan in 41:18-22 seems to picture an unreal sea monster. Furthermore there are similar descriptions of this sea monster in ancient Near Eastern mythology. Nevertheless it seems to most of the commentators and to me that Leviathan here, but not everywhere in Scripture, describes a real animal for the following reasons. The details of the description point to a real animal. Moreover both Behemoth and Leviathan occur elsewhere in Scripture apart from mythical connotations (e.g., Joel 1:20 where the Hebrew word translated "Behemoth" in Job 40:15 reads "beasts"; cf. Ps. 104:26). Additionally, Scripture states that God created Behemoth (Job 40:15) and Leviathan (Ps. 104:26) as well as Job.

Yahweh reminded Job that Behemoth was a creature as he was (40:15). Job was not the Creator; he was on a lower level. The Hebrew word translated "Behemoth" is the plural of the word usually rendered "beast." Consequently some believe verse 15a is an introductory statement for what God says about both animals that follows. However in verses 15b-24 God had one particular animal in view. Since He gave a name to the second animal (41:1), He probably intended that we understand "Behemoth" as a name for the first animal.

²²¹Parsons, p. 149.

²²²Andersen, p. 291.

Bible students have nominated several animals as Behemoth because of its description in 40:15-24. Some of these are the elephant,²²³ the extinct rhinoceros that had no horn,²²⁴ the extinct brontosaurus dinosaur,²²⁵ the water buffalo,²²⁶ and most popularly the hippopotamus.²²⁷ Perhaps both Behemoth and Leviathan refer to dinosaurs of different types or perhaps other ancient animals that have now become extinct.

Verse 19a probably means Behemoth is the first in size and strength perhaps among animals of its kind or among animals in Job's area.

"The adult hippopotamus weighs up to eight thousand pounds."²²⁸

Verse 19b may mean that only its Maker should dare go near it for hand-to-hand combat; no human being would defeat it.²²⁹ The definite article "the" before "Jordan" in verse 23b is absent in the Hebrew text. This may mean that God had any swift river in mind, any Jordan.²³⁰ "When he is on watch" (v. 24a) is literally "by the eyes," the only parts of a submerged hippopotamus, along with its nose (v. 24b), that are visible above the water.

Various writers have identified Leviathan in 41:1 as a mythical sea monster,²³¹ a marine dinosaur,²³² a whale, a dolphin, even a "tunny" (tuna?) fish, and most commonly a crocodile.

This section (ch. 41) contains the longest and last description of an animal in the book. As such it is climactic. God first drew Job's attention to the fact that Leviathan was very hard for people to capture and use (vv. 1-11). Since Job could not challenge Leviathan successfully, he should hardly expect to challenge its Creator successfully (v. 10). Job should not think that because he had a little wisdom and strength he could get the best of God in a contest. He could not even overcome Leviathan, one of God's creatures. "Given to" (v. 11a) is literally "anticipated."

"The argument to the superior strength of God is made, not to discourage men from trying to have dealings with God, but to enhance God's capability of managing the affairs of the universe so that men will trust Him."²³³

²²³R. Laird Harris, "The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God," *Grace Journal* 13 (Fall 1976):20-21.

²²⁴Bernard Northrup, "Light on the Ice Age," *Bible-Science Newsletter*, June 1976, p. 4.

²²⁵"Dinosaurs and the Bible," *Five Minutes with the Bible and Science* (supplement to *Bible-Science Newsletter*, May 1976), p. 2.

²²⁶B. Coureyer, "Qui est Behemoth?" *Revue Biblique* 82 (1975):418-43.

²²⁷Most commentators hold this view.

²²⁸Zuck, *Job*, p. 179.

²²⁹Reichert, p. 212.

²³⁰Rowley, p. 257.

²³¹Pope, pp. 329-31.

²³²"Dinosaurs and . . ."

²³³Andersen, p. 290.

Verses 12-25 emphasize Leviathan's anatomy. "His sneezes flash forth light" (v. 18a) may mean that in the proper light the spray from his nostrils looked like jets of light.²³⁴ Its eyes may be like the "eyelids of the morning" (v. 18b) in that they were the first part of the animal to become visible as it rose to the water's surface.²³⁵ Verses 19-21 may describe its release of "pent-up breath together with water in a hot stream from its mouth [that] looks like a stream of fire in the sunshine."²³⁶

The last section of this description (vv. 26-34) emphasizes man's inability to capture Leviathan. Verse 31b may allude to the foam that formed on the top of a pot when someone was preparing ointment.²³⁷ The deep appeared grey-headed (v. 32b) perhaps when the animal's wake made whitecaps on the dark water. The section concludes by stressing this beast's fearless confidence. If people cannot shake the confidence of one of God's creatures, how foolish it was for Job to think he could intimidate God.

To some degree Job, his three friends, and Elihu had all based their arguments on the rationality of God's acts. God reminded them of Behemoth and Leviathan partially to teach them all that His actions transcend our ability to explain everything rationally.

"Animals independent of man (38:39—39:30) and animals dangerous and repulsive to man (40:15—41:34) were all a grand zoological exhibition to help Job sense that because he had nothing to do with making, sustaining, or even subduing them, it was unthinkable that he could question their Creator."²³⁸

Another writer advocated a different view with which I do not agree.

". . . the beasts themselves celebrate instead Job's triumph."²³⁹

One might conclude after reading these speeches of Yahweh that God is not very compassionate. He may seem more concerned about establishing His own glory than about Job's suffering. However, we need to remember that God could have said nothing. Furthermore by directing Job's thinking as He did, God did what was best for Job, the truly loving thing. He did not just give him answers to specific questions but a vision of Himself that would transform Job's life forever after. God's words to Job may sound harsh, but He was simply responding to Job in the same vein as Job had been addressing Him (cf. 2 Sam. 22:26-27; Ps. 18:25-26). He did not do this to mock him but to make a forceful impression on him. The forcefulness of His words harmonizes with the forcefulness of His revelation and the forcefulness of His person.²⁴⁰ God wants us to

²³⁴Reichert, p. 216.

²³⁵Ibid.

²³⁶Rowley, p. 262.

²³⁷Zuck, *Job*, p. 183.

²³⁸Ibid.

²³⁹John G. Gammie, "Behemoth and Leviathan: On the Didactic and Theological Significance of Job 40:15-41:26," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, p. 231.

²⁴⁰See Robert Gordis, "The Lord out of the Whirlwind." *Judaism* 13:1 (Winter 1964):48-63.

understand Him as best we can within our finite human limitations. That is evidently why He spoke to Job, and that is why He preserved this record of His revelation in Scripture.²⁴¹

"That no summary challenge was needed at the end of the Lord's second speech is indicative that Job's second response (42:1-6) was a willing one in contrast to his initial reluctant reply (40:3-5)."²⁴²

4. Job's second reply to God 42:1-6

Job's words reveal the changes that God's revelations had produced in him. He was aware as never before that God had all power and all wisdom. This resulted in an attitude of awe and submission (v. 2). He saw that it was foolish for him to question God's actions. God knew what He was doing even though Job did not.

By quoting God's first question back to him (v. 3a; 38:2) Job meant, "You were exactly right in saying, 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge.' That is just what I have been doing." He admitted having spoken presumptuously (v. 3b-c).

He also repeated what God had said when He began each of His speeches (v. 4; 38:3; 40:7). God had asked for Job's reply. Now Job gave it. However it was not the courtroom accusation he had said he wanted to deliver to God. It was instead a confession of his own folly.

"He has not only realized his folly in passing judgment on things that were beyond his understanding. He has found the answer to his problem. For at bottom this was not a problem of theodicy, but a problem of fellowship. He has not learned the cause of his sufferings or the explanation of the apparent injustices in the world, but he has found God again. For hitherto he, no less than his friends, had believed that his sufferings meant that God had cast him off and that he was isolated from him who had been his friend in days gone by. But now God had come to him and spoken to him, and he knew that he could have fellowship with God even in his sufferings. Therefore Job declares that he has found a new understanding of God, compared with which his former knowledge was but as the knowledge of rumour [*sic*] compared with sight. This is the climax of the book, as we should expect to find at the end of the poetic portion, for which the Prologue and Epilogue are but the setting."²⁴³

"To Job the supremely important thing is that God has come to him in his suffering, showing him that he is not isolated from God by his suffering. He has cried for God again and again, and God has come to him, not to

²⁴¹For seven different explanations of the meaning of Yahweh's speeches to Job, see Donald E. Gowan, "God's Answer to Job: How Is It an Answer?" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 8:2 (December 1986):85-102.

²⁴²Parsons, p. 141.

²⁴³Rowley, p. 265.

enter into debate with him on the issues he has thrashed out with his friends, but to show him that now, when he most needs God, God is with him. . . . It is of the essence of its [the book's] message that Job found God *in* his suffering, and so found relief not *from* his misfortunes, but *in* them."²⁴⁴

Job had heard of God from others previously. This limited secondhand knowledge had led him to some false conclusions. Now, after more revelation, he saw God more clearly. He had greater spiritual insight (v. 5).

This greater understanding of God enabled Job to understand himself better. He saw both God and himself more realistically.²⁴⁵ "Retract" means to "despise" or "reject." Job evidently not only withdrew his charges against God but also despised and rejected his attitude of pride. Job had previously expressed remorse over his losses, but now he grieved over his sins. Job's repentance seems to have been more than turning from his sorrowful condition. He changed his mind and abandoned his rebellious pride and arrogance toward God.²⁴⁶

"He does not repent of sins that have allegedly brought on the suffering; he repents of his arrogance in impugning God's justice, he repents of the attitude whereby he simply demands an answer; as if such were owed him. He repents of not having known God better . . ."²⁴⁷

Job admitted sinning because he suffered, but he did not admit that he was suffering because he had sinned.²⁴⁸

Job forgot his cry for vindication since he had received something much better: a revelation of the person of God and renewed fellowship with God. He had lost all, but he had found God and was now content. He had stopped asking, "Why?" since he had come to know God. We do not need to know why if we know God. This is one of the great lessons of this book.

"Suffering is sometimes a mystery. We must affirm both the mystery and God. . . . The God speeches remind us that a Person, not a principle, is Lord."²⁴⁹

Temptation to become distressed overtakes us all when bad things happen to us. We want to know why things happen as they do. If we know that God is in control and that in His loving wisdom He has permitted our suffering and controls it, we do not need to know

²⁴⁴Ibid., p. 20.

²⁴⁵See William Lillie, "The Religious Significance of the Theophany in the Book of Job," *Expository Times* 68:11 (August 1957):355-58.

²⁴⁶Patrick, p. 369-71.

²⁴⁷D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, p. 174.

²⁴⁸Zuck, *Job*, p. 185.

²⁴⁹Bullock, pp. 108-9.

why we are in pain. That is not to say we should stop trying to discover reasons. Our suffering may be due to our sin, as Job's three friends said, or because God wants to teach us something, as Elihu affirmed. However suffering may not be our lot for these reasons. When we cannot determine why we are suffering we can still rest in God and continue to trust and obey Him because we know He is sovereign and loving.

This is a very important perspective to help other people who are suffering see. By sharing it we can be genuine comforters, not miserable comforters like Job's friends.

"Sometimes the best answers to life's most baffling and troubling questions lie not in what God says but in who He is. When believers recognize that truth, they begin to see that God does not just know the answers but, in fact, is the answer. To know Him is to know all one needs to know. The rest may come later but is unnecessary for now (1 Cor. 2:9; 1 John 2 [sic 3]:2-3)."²⁵⁰

III. EPILOGUE 42:7-17

The book closes as it opened with a prose explanation by the inspired human writer. He gave us important information about Job's friends (vv. 7-9) and then Job's fortunes (vv. 10-17).

". . . Satan and Job's wife (who are prominent in the prologue as agents of evil who try to get Job to curse God) are intentionally omitted in the epilogue. This deliberate omission emphasizes a major teaching of the book, namely, that man's relationship to God is not a 'give-and-get' bargain nor a business contract of mutual benefit."²⁵¹

A. JOB'S FRIENDS 42:7-9

God addressed Eliphaz but also had Bildad and Zophar in view. He evidently excluded Elihu because he had not misrepresented God as the other three friends had. Their error was limiting God's sovereignty. By asserting that God always punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous in this life they were limiting God and committing a sin that required a sacrifice for atonement (covering). Modern prosperity theology advocates should take note!

Job evidently forgave his friends as God had forgiven him (cf. Matt. 6:12) and prayed for them as a priest (cf. 1:5; Matt. 5:44). Job stood as a mediator between his friends and God. He had previously felt the need of a mediator himself.

"They had attempted to restore Job to God by philosophy. He is now to be the means of restoring them by prayer."²⁵²

²⁵⁰Merrill, p. 400.

²⁵¹Parsons, p. 142.

²⁵²Morgan, pp. 219-20.

Rather than judging Job, God accepted him because he was indeed His "servant," not the rebel that his friends accused him of being. The writer used the word "servant" four times in these verses. He had served God, among other ways, by being the vehicle through whom God brought the revelation of this book to its readers.

B. JOB'S FORTUNE 42:10-17

Notice that God began to prosper Job again after he interceded for his friends (v. 10), not just after he repented. His willingness to pray for his enemies showed the genuineness of the transformation that had taken place in his heart. He no longer felt antagonistic toward God but accepting of his enemies (cf. Matt. 6:15).

The Lord increased all that Job possessed twofold (v. 10).

Item	Before	After	Total
Sheep	7,000	7,000	14,000
Camels	3,000	3,000	6,000
Yoke of Oxen	500	500	1,000
Female Donkeys ²⁵³	500	500	1,000
Sons	7	7	14
Daughters	3	3	6
Age in Years ²⁵⁴	70	140	210

The names of Job's daughters (v. 14) corroborate the statement that they were exceptionally beautiful (v. 15). "Jemimah" means "dove," "Keziah" means "perfume," and "Keren-happuch" means "horn of eye-paint." The reference to Job giving them an inheritance with their brothers, an unusual practice in the ancient Near East, reflects the extent of Job's wealth and compassion.

Does the fact that God eventually blessed Job materially in life for his godliness prove Job's three friends were right after all? Is the basis of man's relationship with God really retribution? No, God did not reward Job in life primarily because he was good but because God is gracious.²⁵⁵ The basis of people's relationship with God is grace. The Book of Job does not deny the fact that God blesses the righteous. However, it shows that this principle has exceptions if we look at life only this side of the grave. Because God is sovereign He can deal with anyone as He chooses for reasons only He knows. Nevertheless He always deals justly (cf. Rom. 9:14).

²⁵³Female donkeys were more valuable than male donkeys because the females produced milk and foals.

²⁵⁴These figures are traditional. See Zuck, *Job*, p. 188.

²⁵⁵Parsons, p. 145; Andersen, p. 294.

"The restoration of Job's prosperity was not the reward of his piety, but the indication that the trial was over. Any judge who left a defendant to languish in prison after he had been declared innocent would be condemned as iniquitous, and if Job's trials had continued after he was acquitted it would have been similarly iniquitous."²⁵⁶

The fact that Job lived 140 years after his affliction (v. 16) suggests that God blessed him with twice the normal lifespan of "threescore years and ten" (Ps. 90:10 AV) after his trials ended. The Septuagint preserves the Jewish tradition that Job died at the age of 240, though a variant reading has 248. This assumes that Job was 70 when his trials began (the perfect age?) and that he lived twice as long after his trials ended.

"This chapter assures us that, no matter what happens to us, *God always writes the last chapter*. Therefore, we don't have to be afraid. We can trust God to do what is right, no matter how painful our situation might be. . . .

"His [Job's] greatest blessing was *knowing God better and understanding His working in a deeper way*."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶Rowley, p. 266.

²⁵⁷Wiersbe, p. 82.

Conclusion

I believe the primary application of the Book of Job is that we do not need to know why God does what He does if we know Him. Job is a book that deals with persevering faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7).²⁵⁸

"To sufferers in all ages the book of Job declares that less important than fathoming the intellectual problem of the mystery of suffering is the appropriation of its spiritual enrichment through the fellowship of God."²⁵⁹

In this book the writer clarified the basis of human relationship with God. It is not retribution. Retribution is the theory that before death God always pays someone in kind according to what that person gives Him, blessing for righteousness or suffering for unrighteousness. We should not return to God what God sends us either, worship for blessing or cursing for pain. Rather the basis of our relationship is grace. God owes people nothing. Because people are sinful creatures God can justly curse us. However because God is a loving Father He chooses to bless us in many cases. People's response to God's grace should be trust and obedience.

Why do the godly suffer?

Person(s)	Answer	Evaluation
Job's wife	God is unfair.	Never
Job's three friends	God is disciplining (punishing) them because of sin.	Sometimes
Job	God wants to destroy them because of sin.	Sometimes
Elihu	God wants to direct (educate) them because of ignorance.	Sometimes
God	God wants to develop them and to demonstrate His glory.	Always

The different characters in the book based their understanding and their convictions on different sources of knowledge.

Person(s)	Epistemological base
Job's wife	Empiricism
Job's three friends	Rationalism
Job	Rationalism
Elihu	Human inspiration
God	Revelation

²⁵⁸Henry McKeating, "The Central Issue of the Book of Job," *Expository Times* 82:8 (May 1971):246, wrote, "Job's central question is: . . . How can I go on believing in God?" See also R. A. F. MacKenzie, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job," *Biblica* 40:2 (1959):435-45.

²⁵⁹Rowley, p. 21.

Job's three friends each had a different basis of authority.

Person	Authoritative base
Eliphaz	Experience
Bildad	Tradition
Zophar	Intuition

Some of the practical lessons the Book of Job teaches include the following. God is in control even when He appears not to be. The good will of God includes suffering, in spite of what faith healers say. Bad things happen to good people because God allows Satan to test them so they will grow, not because God seduces them to do evil (cf. James 1:13). God is just in spite of appearances. Whatever God does is right because He does it. We can and should worship God even when we are suffering. We can trust God even when we have no explanation for what is happening to us. It is futile and foolish to criticize God or to challenge Him. We create problems for ourselves when we put God in a box. When we feel anxious we should seek to get to know God better by consulting His special revelation, the Bible.²⁶⁰

"The book of Job makes an outstanding contribution to the theology of God and man. God is seen as sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, and caring. By contrast, man is seen as finite, ignorant, and sinful. And yet, even in the face of suffering, man can worship God, confident that His ways are perfect and that pride has no place before Him."²⁶¹

²⁶⁰Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Job," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:604 (October-December 1994):393-413, suggested four hermeneutical and four homiletical guidelines to encourage the preaching and teaching of Job.

²⁶¹Zuck, "A Theology . . .," p. 232.

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