

# THE BOOK OF JOB

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## Contents

Introduction.....	2
The Text.....	4
I. The Prologue: The Suffering and Patience of Job (ch. 1-2).....	4
II. Job's Complaint (ch. 3).....	8
III. First Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 4-14).....	8
A. Eliphaz (ch. 4-5).....	9
B. Job (ch. 6-7).....	10
C. Bildad (ch. 8).....	12
D. Job (ch. 9-10).....	13
E. Zophar (ch. 11).....	16
F. Job (ch. 12-14).....	16
IV. Second Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 15-21).....	19
A. Eliphaz (ch. 15).....	19
B. Job (ch. 16-17).....	20
C. Bildad (ch. 18).....	22
D. Job (ch. 19).....	22
E. Zophar (ch. 20).....	24
F. Job (ch. 21).....	24
V. Third Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 22-31).....	25
A. Eliphaz (ch. 22).....	25
B. Job (ch. 23-24).....	26
C. Bildad (ch. 25).....	26
D. Job (ch. 26-31).....	27
VI. Elihu's Speech (ch. 32-37).....	30
VII. Yahweh Speaks (ch. 38-41).....	35
VIII. Job Repents (ch. 42:1-6).....	38
IX. Prose Epilogue – Job's Restoration (ch. 42:7-17).....	40
Some Lessons.....	41

## Introduction

The Book of Job is, of course, named after its main character, Job. That name is not attested elsewhere in Hebrew but an equivalent of the name appears in archives of various population groups with similar languages (Western Semitic) dating from the second millennium B.C. These include the archives at Alalakh (in Turkey), Mari (northern Syria), Ugarit (northern Syria), and Aštarte (northern Jordan).

In those languages, the name seems to carry the meaning "Where is the father?" with "father" standing in for the name of a god. If that sense carried into the Hebrew form, the Hebrew name Job could mean "Where is Yahweh?" See Richard Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 193. But neither the Old Testament nor later rabbinic sources attach any particular meaning to the name Job, so it is probably best not to speculate.

Job is identified as living in the "land of Uz," which was outside of Israel, probably in the region to the south that would later be known as Edom. At least, Lam. 4:21 uses Uz in parallel with Edom, and a man named Uz is listed in a genealogy of people from Edom (Gen. 36:28; 1 Chron. 1:42). Job probably was not an Israelite because, even if he lived after the time of Abraham, he lived in the land of Uz and shows no awareness of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

Various clues indicate the events of the Book of Job come from a very early time, perhaps before the patriarchs. These include how his wealth was measured (in livestock and servants rather than land or precious metals), his lifespan of more than 140 years, his essentially acting as a priest for his family, and the presence of roving bands of Sabeans and Chaldeans.

But the date of the events in the work is different from the date the work was composed. On that score, we have little to go on. The human author(s) or creator(s) of the book is nowhere identified nor is the time of composition. Since the prophet Ezekiel and his audience were familiar with Job (Ezek. 14:14, 20), the work was known in at least some form by the sixth century B.C. How much earlier and in what form it was known at that earlier time is unclear.

Some have dated the book to the time of Moses and others to the time of Solomon, but most scholars today date the final form of the work somewhere between the seventh and second centuries B.C. We cannot be sure, but that uncertainty does not hinder one's interpretation. Tremper Longman states in *Job*, BCOT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 26:

In conclusion, it is admittedly impossible to prove that Job was an original authorial whole. Nor is it possible to prove that it was written over an extended period of time. Neither point is important. What is crucial, at least for the church, which has received the final form of the book as canonical, is to interpret the book as it presently stands.

Hebrew scholars all acknowledge the difficulty in translating the Book of Job. It has many rare words, which makes it difficult to be sure of their meaning, and includes difficult

grammar. So there is more room than normal for translation disagreements, and you will see this in any comparison of translations and commentaries. I worked principally from the ESV, but I reviewed numerous translations, including those of scholarly commentators, in pondering the book. When I opt for a less common translation, I will usually point that out.

It is helpful to keep in mind that Job is not a newspaper report of ancient events; it is a literary work based on those events. It consists of a lengthy poetic section (3:1-42:6, with some prose sprinkled in) that is bookended with stylized prose narratives (1:1-2:13; 42:7-17). The prose framework sets the storyline, the plot in which Job's poetic lament and the following poetic dialogues or speeches function, and thus it helps to guide their interpretation.

The fact Job is a literary work rather than a newspaper report does not mean, of course, that it is not inspired. It means that whoever was involved in the production of the completed work, the form of the book as we have it in Scripture – whether authors, editors, and/or compilers – was moved by the Spirit to express the story in that particular form, to give it that particular literary shape. We must respect the Spirit's choice in that regard and understand the revelation according to the form in which he gave it.

The structure of Job is for the most part straightforward and clear:

Prose prologue introducing the characters and plot (ch. 1-2)

Job's complaint (ch. 3)

Three cycles of dialogues or speeches (ch. 4-31)<sup>1</sup>

First cycle

Eliphaz (ch. 4-5)

Job (ch. 6-7)

Bildad (ch. 8)

Job (ch. 9-10)

Zophar (ch. 11)

Job (ch. 12-14)

Second Cycle

Eliphaz (ch. 15)

Job (c. 16-17)

Bildad (ch. 18)

Job (ch. 19)

Zophar (ch. 20)

Job (ch. 21)

Third Cycle

Eliphaz (ch. 22)

Job (ch. 23-24)

Bildad (ch. 25)

Job (ch. 26-31)

Elihu's monologue (ch. 32-37)

Yahweh speaks (ch. 38-41)

Job repents (ch. 42:1-6)

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<sup>1</sup> Some, like Longman, separate chapters 28-31 from the third cycle and label it "Job's monologue."

## Prose epilogue – Job's restoration (ch. 42:7-17)

In the dialogue section, the claims and arguments of Job's friends and Job are repeated frequently in various forms almost to the point of tedium. But that is by design. It serves to reinforce the book's message about the limitations of human wisdom. It illustrates how human wisdom can pursue and continue groping with no advance. Some things, like the mystery of suffering, are hidden in God and can only be grasped if he chooses to reveal specially its purpose and meaning.

In the following, I was most helped by Tremper Longman's commentary, though I part company with him in places. I also consulted the following with some frequency: **David J. A. Clines**, *Job*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1989, 2006, 2011) (3 vols.); **John E. Hartley**, *Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); **Elmer B. Smick**, "Job" (revised by Longman) in Tremper Longman III and David Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 4:675-921; **Samuel E. Balentine**, *Job*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006); and **Norman C. Habel**, *The Book of Job*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).

Because of the length of Job, I do not provide the biblical text in my notes. Also, I often summarize my understanding of the meaning of verses or sections rather than provide a detailed analysis of the specific language.

## The Text

### I. The Prologue: The Suffering and Patience of Job (ch. 1-2)

A. Job is introduced as the epitome of a godly wise man. He is described as blameless and upright (innocent and virtuous), one who fears God and turns away from evil (1:1), and that description is twice affirmed as true by God (1:8, 2:3).

B. This picture is reinforced by the report that Job regularly would offer burnt offerings for his children after their various birthday celebrations just in case they may have sinned and cursed God in their hearts (1:5). Whether such a sacrifice would have any effect without repentance and participation of the sinner is not the point. The point is that Job was so religiously devout that he was concerned about his children's possible sin and offered sacrifices in the hope of gaining God's mercy on their behalf.

C. As Longman points out (p. 79), "In Proverbs these terms [blameless/innocent and upright/virtuous] refer to people who do what is morally correct. They are the ones who heed the commands of the father and gain wisdom. Their lives are largely marked by ethical rightness and legal obedience." So one thing we as readers know for a fact is that Job is a pious and devout servant of God. He is not sinless – no mere human is – but he is a paragon of faithfulness. That is not up for debate.

D. There is a clear stream of teaching in the Old Testament that connects rewards and blessings with the righteous living that flows from godly wisdom and connects suffering and punishment with the wickedness that flows from folly, a rejection of divine wisdom. Certain sections of Proverbs support such an understanding (e.g., 3:9-10, 12:21, 13:21, 16:5, 21:7, 24:16) as do the promises of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27-28 and the judgments against Israel and Judah as explained in the books of Samuel and Chronicles and by the prophets.

E. The abundant blessings of righteous Job fit comfortably within that theology. His cup overflows with sons and daughters, bountiful livestock, and very many servants, so much so that he is described as the greatest of all the people of the east (1:2-3). His great blessings are fully expected within a theology that absolutely or mechanically links piety and blessing, righteousness and abundance.

F. But the story takes a challenging turn as the scene shifts to the heavenly realm (1:6). There the angelic beings are presenting themselves before God Almighty, and "the Satan," the ultimate adversary, is at that time still permitted to come among them and to have some kind of access to God.

#### G. The first challenge: Job's family and wealth

1. Satan says to God that he has been prowling the earth (1:7), no doubt seeking to expose as hypocrites all of God's ostensibly faithful servants, those who might appear to the heavenly court to be humans living lives of true devotion to God. That is why God recommends Job for Satan's consideration (1:8). He identifies him to Satan as the real deal, the supreme example of a truly pious, God-fearing human. In other words, unbeknownst to Job, he is chosen by God to be the standard-bearer of human commitment and devotion to God, to be mankind's champion against the claim that all humans are at bottom pretenders who ultimately serve only themselves.

2. That is why Satan responds to God's recommendation of Job with the accusation that Job serves God only from self-interest, only because God pays him to do so by granting him wealth and blessings in return. He proposes to prove that God's confidence in Job, and thus in any of mankind, is misplaced by declaring that Job will curse God to his face, meaning abandon his commitment and devotion to him, terminate their relationship, if God will take away the things that he has (1:9-11).

3. God expresses his confidence in Job by permitting Satan to take away all the things he has (1:12), meaning his livestock, his servants, and his children, which Satan promptly proceeds to do. Through raids by the Sabeans and Chaldeans, lightning (fire of God from heaven), and a great windstorm, Satan takes from Job his oxen, donkeys, sheep, cattle, servants, and children. He pulls no punches, taking everything God permitted him to take (1:13-19).

4. It is important to recognize that Satan is not God's equal. Christians are not like the Persian Zoroastrians, people who believe creation is locked in a battle between two opposing and roughly equal forces of good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan, so that the ultimate outcome is uncertain. That is a heretical view of God and creation. God is sovereign, he is

supreme; Satan is a creature, and as the text makes clear, he can do only what he is permitted by God to do.

5. After Job's devastating losses, we read in Job 1:20-22: <sup>20</sup> *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.* <sup>21</sup> *And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."* <sup>22</sup> *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*

#### H. The second challenge: Job's body and health

1. In chapter 2, there is essentially a repeat of the heavenly scene (2:1-2), but this time God points out to Satan that Job holds fast his integrity, continues to be devoted to God, despite the extreme test Satan had claimed would prove that Job's faith was superficial and self-centered (2:3). (Note that when God says in 2:3 that he had been moved to destroy Job *for no good reason*, he is not saying that Job being the standard-bearer of human commitment and devotion to God was not a good reason; he means the suffering he allowed to be inflicted was not grounded in any fault in Job. It was not punishment or discipline for some sin.) Satan then claims that the test was not extreme enough in that it affected only Job's external things and not his own body and health. He says if God will strike Job's body and health, if Job is made to suffer physically rather than just emotionally, he will disown God, curse him to his face (2:4-5).

2. God again expresses his confidence in Job by permitting Satan to strike his body and health, but he forbids him from taking his life (2:6). Satan promptly struck Job with painful sores or boils from head to foot (2:7). Job is in absolute misery, scraping the sores with broken pieces of pottery as he sits on the ash heap in mourning (2:8). His situation is so bad that his wife counsels him in 2:9 to "curse God and die." From her perspective, "suicide by God," renouncing him and then presumably being killed as a result, would be preferable to holding his commitment to God and continuing to suffer so terribly.

3. Job tells his wife in 2:10 that she was speaking like one of the foolish women and then asks rhetorically if they should receive good from God but not accept the trouble or adversity that he allows in one's life. So despite even physical suffering, Job did not curse God, did not renounce or abandon God, contrary to what Satan had claimed. Rather, he stayed firmly in relationship with God. That relationship was not dependent on the gifts he received from God. Verse 10 ends with, "In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

I. With the clear indication in 2:7-10 that Job maintained his loyalty to God in the face of even physical suffering, the focus of the book shifts from Job's motivation for his relationship with God – whether he was loyal because he was paid well – to the question raised by the test of that motivation, that is, the question of human suffering.

1. The test of motivation is still in the background as Job's suffering drags on. It is understood by the reader to be the immediate cause of his suffering, but no further mention is made of Satan or his challenge. Job's steadfastness in the face of *prolonged* physical suffering is anticipated by his refusal to curse God in the face of tremendous but relatively *short* emotional

and physical suffering, but his prolonged physical suffering produces some distinctive cracks and drives him to say things about God for which he later repents.

a. Eliphaz says of Job in 15:6, "Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you" and in 15:12-13, "Why does your heart carry you away, and why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God and bring such words out of your mouth?" In 42:3, after God speaks in the whirlwind, Job acknowledges he spoke about things of which he was ignorant, and he declares in 42:6, "therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

b. Elmer Smick comments in "Job" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 4:696, "What lifts the book to literary and theological greatness is the author's deft presentation of a truly righteous man whose commitment to God is total, yet who can still struggle with God to the point of rage over the mystery of God's ways."

c. But through it all, it remains true that Job does not *curse* God. In all the emotional storms and spiritual struggles that accompany his prolonged physical suffering, Job does not renounce or abandon God. He struggles greatly with him, caught between his pain and an inability to make sense of it, and in that emotional vortex he denies God's commitment to his welfare and charges him with wrong, but he never cuts off his relationship. And thus Satan's claim that Job would curse God remains disproved.

d. Given Job's false charges against God, when God says in 42:7 that Job spoke of him what is right, he is not approving everything that Job said. On the contrary, he just rebuked Job for wrongly accusing him during the dispute with his friends.

(1) Rather, God is saying Job spoke of him what is right in that Job, by steadfastly maintaining that he was righteous, in effect denied his friends' false claim that God governs the world according to a strict or absolutist retributive justice, that he brings suffering on all the unrighteous and only on the unrighteous and pours out blessings on all the righteous and only on the righteous. Job holds himself out as proof that God does not operate that way. Of course, Job thought that made God unjust because he accepted, with his friends, that God *should* operate that way, but he nevertheless rejected implicitly their assertion that God does in fact operate that way.

(2) Job also spoke of God what is right in his confession that he had been speaking "out of his league" (42:1-6). That carries an acknowledgement of God's incomparable majesty.

2. But what is really on display from 2:11 forward is mankind's attempt to make sense of human suffering. This attempt raises implicitly an even more basic question: where does true wisdom reside, the insight into how things really function, into how reality is actually structured, that allows one to live skillfully in this world?

3. Job and his friends all lay claim to wisdom, to true insight into the matter of his suffering, but as the book will suggest, all human assessments must remain subject to the

wisdom above. Reasoning from experience and observations can, when divorced from special revelation, easily go off track. So in the absence of such revelation, we must explore wisdom with humility and hold our conclusions loosely. We can discern things, find our way to wisdom, but we are finite and prone to misperception.

J. When Job's three friends – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite – heard of the great hardship that had come upon him, they agreed to meet together and go to Job to sympathize with and comfort him (2:11). This suggests that they may have come to Job more like a team, three individuals who share a common viewpoint or perspective. That seems to be the case in the speeches they later deliver.

K. By this time, Job may have been suffering for quite a while. Indeed, he was so ravaged by his affliction that they did not even recognize him when they approached (2:12). The friends cried, tore their robes, and sprinkled dust on their heads, which were cultural signs of sorrow and mourning. They then sat with Job on the ground for seven days and nights without saying a word because they saw how greatly he was suffering (2:13). Whatever criticism fairly may be leveled against these men, let's not forget the compassion they here showed.

## II. Job's Complaint (ch. 3)

A. The prose narrative gives way to poetry in chapter 3, which continues (with a sprinkling of prose) into chapter 42. This shift in literary form corresponds to the shift in focus from the test of motivation to the question of suffering. In the first ten verses Job curses the day of his birth, wishing he could obliterate it from the record of days. He goes on to lament his birth, the fact he did not die at birth or in the womb and thereby avoid the misery he is experiencing. He is not speaking to anyone at this point; he simply is venting his deepest feelings and thoughts.

B. Notice it is Job who breaks the silence by complaining bitterly about his situation. This is not like the laments one reads in Psalms (e.g., Psalm 88) or in Jeremiah 20 which are addressed to God and include some ray of hope. There is a difference in bringing cries of our suffering to God and grumbling about it to others as one who has no hope. As Longman notes (p. 54), "Job speaks more like the Israelites in the wilderness who grumble against God than the psalmist who brings his laments before God. This distinction helps us to understand why the three friends feel they must speak out now against Job, and so begins chap. 4."

C. The obscurity of 3:8 calls for comment. Leviathan is some great sea creature (see ch. 41) that as embellished in pagan mythology came to embody the forces of chaos and destruction that were overcome in creation. Job plays off that culturally familiar sense in 3:8. After calling on the experts at delivering curses, such as Balaam was, to curse the day of his birth, he refers to them as those who are ready to rouse Leviathan, meaning they are ready to unleash the kind of destructive forces he desires to eradicate the day of his birth.

## III. First Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 4-14)

The "debate" has four participants, but there really are only two principal perspectives, that of Job and that of his three friends. In other words, the three friends give variations of a

single take on the situation, namely that Job's suffering is a consequence of his sin and therefore the path to relief is repentance. Job, on the other hand, knows that is not the case. He knows (as do the readers) that he is genuinely devout. He is not sinless, but there is nothing in his life that can account for the degree of suffering he has experienced. So he concludes that God is being unjust toward him.

The speeches are not what normally would be considered a debate or a dialogue. Not only do the participants speak in poetry, but they speak in turn, and rather than engaging the argument of the previous speaker point by point, they tend to speak in generalities and somewhat independently of what was said before. It is akin to politicians with talking points.

Notice that Job and his friends all embrace what Longman and others call "retribution theology." In short, they share the conviction that rewards and blessings accompany righteous living and suffering and punishment accompany sinful living; good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Job's friends conclude from that assumption that Job is a sinner in need of repentance, whereas Job concludes that God is violating that principle and is therefore unjust. Despite this formidable gathering of wise men, the truth eludes them; it lies in the wisdom of God.

#### A. Eliphaz (ch. 4-5)

1. The fact Eliphaz speaks first suggests he is the leader of the friends, perhaps the senior member. He is an Edomite, as indicated by the fact the name Eliphaz is associated with Esau, who is called Edom (Gen. 25:30; 36:1), and Teman, the place from which Eliphaz comes, is associated with Edom (see Gen. 36:11, 15; 1 Chron. 1:36; Jer. 49:7, 20; Ezek. 25:13; Amos 1:12; Obad. 9; Hab. 3:3).

2. Eliphaz politely expresses his intention to challenge Job's complaint, which given the circumstances, he is not eager to do. Yet, he feels he must for Job's own good if for nothing else (4:1-2). He compliments Job for having guided and strengthened others through his wise counsel and instruction and then accuses him of failing to bring that same wisdom to bear in his own situation (4:3-5).

3. Job had no doubt guided others in their suffering by applying the accepted wisdom of retribution theology, the notion that suffering inevitably is rooted in sinfulness and that repentance therefore is key to relief. But as Job's complaint made clear, he refuses to apply that wisdom to his own situation and thus rejects the insight that would give him hope of restoration. His refusal to take his own medicine leaves him in despair.

4. As with all people, Job's confidence and hope lie in his fearing God and living faithfully, so those qualities form the path out of his darkness (4:6). It is not the innocent and upright who die young, for example; rather, it is those who plow iniquity and sow trouble who reap from God hardship and trouble. Though the wicked appear strong and invincible like lions, God will destroy them because of their evil (4:7-11).

5. Of course, as a general principle it is true that one will reap hardship from living sinfully. For example, Prov. 22:8 says, "Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity," but it is a serious mistake to turn this into an absolute rule. That false assumption can turn a wise man into a blind guide, which is what we see in the Book of Job.

6. In 4:12-17 Eliphaz recounts an eerie encounter with a spirit, a heavenly messenger of some kind, who indicated by rhetorical questions that humans cannot be righteous and pure before Almighty God. In sharing this, Eliphaz offers divine support for the claim Job is a sinner, which sinfulness he implies is the explanation for his suffering. He adds (4:18-21) that if even spiritual beings have proven untrustworthy, shown they are not above sinning, as in the case of fallen angels, then certainly mere human beings are guilty of sin. (But as Job will indicate in chapter 9, he is innocent of anything that would justify what he is going through.)

7. Eliphaz suggests in 5:1 that no one on earth or in heaven is on Job's side in thinking his suffering is undeserved. From the perspective of his absolutist retribution theology, there are no exceptions or aberrations in God's neatly run cosmos.

8. Alluding to the irritation at and jealousy of other people's lives reflected in Job's complaint, Eliphaz gives a general proverb or principle indicating these negative emotions are hallmarks of the foolish (5:2). He then notes that such people (the fool) can flourish for a time only to have their lives turn disastrous. Their children are killed and they lose their harvest and wealth, much as happened to Job (5:3-5).

9. Misery and hardship have a cause; they do not pop out of thin air. Indeed, they are abundant because humanity is born for trouble in the sense the foolish actions that produce them come naturally (5:6-7). Foolishness, a lack of fear of God, seems to be our default.

10. If he were in Job's shoes, Eliphaz says he would seek God and commit himself to him (5:8); in other words, he would repent. He would do so because of the great and marvelous things God does within nature and among human beings (5:9-16).

11. Eliphaz says that suffering as discipline for sin is really a blessing because if the intended lesson is received, meaning if repentance is forthcoming, it produces healing. And when the relationship is healed, one comes under the safety and blessings that God, per retribution theology, pours out invariably on the righteous. It will then all be roses (5:17-26). Again, there is truth in this as a general proposition (e.g., Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:4-11), but as Longman explains (p. 131), "Eliphaz's mistake is not in the principle but in believing that it is always true and, in particular, that it is true in the case of Job."

12. He ends his speech by declaring they have searched it out and it is true. He urges Job to heed it for his own good (5:27).

## B. Job (ch. 6-7)

1. Job says that if his anguish and misery could be placed on a scale, they would outweigh all the sand on the seashore. That is why he spoke without restraint; it was forced out

of him by the magnitude of his suffering. In Job's mind, God is at war with him, inflicting his sprit with deadly arrows (6:1-4).

2. It should come as no surprise that he brays and bellows. After all, the donkey and ox do so when they lack food, and Job is analogously lacking any sustenance from life. All that life is serving him is tasteless and inedible, experiences that are sickening and repulsive (6:5-7).

3. He longs for God to resolve to finish him off, to put him out of his misery. He does not consider taking his own life, as that would be a betrayal of God. But if God would take his life he would have the comfort or consolation of knowing that, in spite of unsparing pain, he did not deny the words of the Holy One (6:8-10). In other words, he would die without having betrayed God. This, of course, would have grated on his friends who are convinced from his suffering that he was unfaithful.

4. Job says he has no strength to hold out, no hope of restoration to inspire him to make plans for his future life, no strength like that of stones and bronze that would allow him to resist his pummeling, and no one to help him. His resolve, his inner strength, has been driven from him (6:11-13). Longman comments (p. 139), "Job is in a deep fix, but he sees no way out."

5. In 6:14-23 Job accuses his friends of disloyalty to him, which ultimately is disloyalty to God because he expects friends to exhibit loyalty. And by "loyalty," *hesed* in Hebrew, he means the type of love God shows his people, love that issues in protection and help in times of trouble. From Job's perspective, they are attacking rather than protecting him, intensifying rather than minimizing his suffering, and thus they are not showing a proper attitude of fear toward God.

6. He compares them to a stream one was confident would provide refreshment but which turned out to be dry when it was needed. The shame (for lack of foresight) and disappointment overconfident travelers felt when realizing the stream was dry was what Job has felt with his friends (6:15-20). He says that when they saw his condition they were afraid he might expect something from them, like wealth or intervention with some foe, but he expected nothing but loyalty, which in his case did not require any of those things (6:21-23).

7. Job calls the friends to help him understand what he has done wrong as Eliphaz alleged (6:24). He rebukes them for words they think are so virtuous but which in reality are painful and fail to make the case that he has done wrong (6:25). They blow off his words, the complaint of a despairing man that his suffering is not right, which suggests they are the type who would take advantage of an orphan and sell out a friend (6:26-27).

8. But despite their failure, he is willing to give them another chance. He urges them to question him, to investigate his sense of innocence, rather than simply assume from his suffering that he is sinful. He will tell them the truth (6:28-29). He indicates by the rhetorical question of v. 30 that he is able to know the true nature of his calamity in the sense of knowing it is not due to his sin. (But the parties will continue to frame their wisdom battle in terms of the

false dichotomy – Job is sinful or God is wrong – spawned by their absolutist retribution theology.)

9. In 7:1-10 Job speaks in utter despair of the suffering, futility, and brevity of his life. His nights are torture, and he is like a walking corpse complete with flesh covered by sores, worms, and dirt. Because of his dire and hopeless situation, he says in 7:11 that he is not going to restrain himself but is going to speak in the full bitterness of his soul. He then accuses God of having him on lock down as if he were some great hostile force like the sea or a sea monster. He accuses God of terrorizing him and making his life miserable and complains that God will not look away from him for a moment, will not give him a moment of peace or relief (7:12-19).

10. Job ends this round of his words by declaring in 7:20, through rhetorical questions, that regardless of whether he sinned it cannot warrant the level of punishing attention that God is devoting to him. He asks in 7:21 why God does not simply forgive him rather than subject him to such extreme suffering, the implication being that God is intent on punishing him; he has it in for him. Job ends by declaring he will soon be dead and gone.

### C. Bildad (ch. 8)

1. Bildad opens by suggesting Job needs to cease that kind of talk. He accuses him of being a forceful blowhard, one who speaks with passion or volume but whose words have no real substance (8:1-2).

2. He insists Job is wrong in claiming he does not deserve what has befallen him because in his absolutist retribution theology – the wicked always suffer and the good are always rewarded – if Job is innocent then God is being unjust or unrighteous, which he knows cannot be the case. On that same basis, he even suggests that Job's children died for their sin (8:3-4).

3. Because Job knows he is innocent, he at least knows his friends are wrong in attributing all suffering to God's specific punishment or discipline for acts of sin. But similarly entranced by retribution theology and being in the throes of torment, he is led to charge God with injustice. He is not right in doing that, but as will ultimately be made clear (ch. 42), a false accusation by one without affliction that God governs the world with an absolutist retributive justice is more offensive to God than a false accusation by a righteous sufferer that God is unjust.

a. The latter, the person in Job's situation, is honestly assessing the facts (innocence and suffering) and trying to make sense of them, albeit from within a mistaken theological understanding (retribution theology); the former is closing his mind to the facts (innocence), not being an honest seeker (e.g., rejecting out of hand Job's credible protestations of innocence), to force the situation to conform to a mistaken theological understanding.

b. The latter allows his theology to be challenged by facts but in pain reaches a wrong conclusion, whereas the former in his hubris will not consider any challenge to his theology. The one acting in extremis speaks falsely about God but maintains his integrity and thus encourages others to do the same. The one acting from calm reflection burdens the sufferer with a lie and pulls him toward a dishonest assessment of his life.

4. In 8:5-7 Bildad assures Job that God will restore him if he will repent. Of course, the readers know that Job is not suffering for his sin, so that is a false prescription. Bildad wrongly assumes that suffering necessarily is a sign of sin.

5. Bildad appeals to the tradition of prior generations in 8:8-22. Those who forget God wither and perish like a reed without water. They put their confidence in something that cannot support it, and their success is superficial, something easily removed and quickly forgotten. He ends with a succinct statement of retribution theology (8:20) and further encouragement to repent (8:21-22).

Longman on Retribution Theology (pp. 160-161):

The clearest heirs to Bildad's retribution theology are advocates of the so-called prosperity gospel, which proclaims that God wants to lavish health, wealth, and happiness on his faithful people. Sickness, poverty, and sadness are signs of a lack of faith. But of course it is not just those who affirm the prosperity gospel that find affinity with the retribution theology of the friends. When adversity strikes, we all have the propensity to ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" The assumption is that it is sin, and sin alone, that leads to suffering.

The book of Job is written as a corrective to this view, rejecting retribution theology as an explanation of Job's suffering. . . . Although sin does lead to suffering, it does not always do so right away (see . . . the introduction for an explanation of the biblical view that ultimate reward and punishment happen in the eschaton). . . .

Furthermore, sin is not the only explanation of suffering. Bildad's perspective depends on the idea that suffering originates only in sin. This view was shared by Jesus' disciples when they came across a man born blind: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (John 9:2 NRSV). The disciples could not imagine another possibility than that this man's affliction came from his or his parents' sin. Jesus broadens their horizon (and ours) by responding: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (9:3 NRSV). There are many causes of suffering. Jesus's response (and the book of Job) reminds us not to assume that suffering is necessarily connected to sin.

What is it about retribution theology that makes it so intractable? It is comforting to those who are not suffering at the moment. After all, it gives the semblance of control. If suffering comes about only through sin, then if I do not sin, I will not suffer. To think that we might suffer without sinning is a frightening idea. But the book of Job teaches (as does the whole Bible) that we are not in control – God is. As we read on in the book of Job, we will discover the proper response to this reality.

D. Job (ch. 9-10)

1. Job agrees with retribution theology. He agrees that God rewards the righteous and punishes the guilty, but he knows his treatment is inconsistent with that principle. So he complains in despair that there is no way a mere mortal can prove his innocence before God, can establish that he truly is righteous and undeserving of his present suffering and thus that God is violating the principle in his particular case.

2. God is so great, wise, and powerful that any contest with him would be an utter mismatch. Even the innocent could not prevail when challenging their mistreatment; God would run rings around them and they would come out worse for having tried. Job is complaining, in essence, that the power differential protects God from accountability by his creatures (9:1-10).

3. Job's perception of God at this point is that it is impossible to establish contact with him (9:11), so any attempt to gain vindication cannot even begin. In his pain, he complains that God is above accountability; no one can call him on his unjustified taking from them (9:12).

4. Job sees God as one bent on expressing anger toward him, and he notes that God is so fearful that even the allies of Rahab crouch before him (9:13).

a. Though no mention of Rahab has yet been found outside the Bible, the name seems to refer to a great sea creature who in pagan mythology was overcome in the process of creation. It is unclear whether this creature was a real creature that was embellished in pagan mythology, like Leviathan (see 3:8 and chapter 41), or was a purely mythical construction.

b. But even if Job believed the pagan myth was true, rather than simply using a culturally accepted story to make a point, God does not indicate the myth was true. Job and his friends present as true many things that are wrong. God's message in the book, its normative teaching, comes in part through his correcting of their misunderstandings. Job and his friends (especially his friends) are presented in the book as wisdom teachers who have a lot to learn.

5. Given that God is set on being angry with him, there is no hope of successfully disputing with God. Though he is in the right, he feels that would make no difference. He could not withstand God's questioning and thus could not establish his innocence. Rather than be vindicated, he would be left to appeal to God's mercy to alleviate his suffering (9:14-15).

6. Job says that if he could summon God and he answered, he does not believe God would pay any attention to his case. After all, if he was interested in Job's innocence, he would not have inflicted this great suffering on him without cause in the first place, suffering that is so great he cannot catch his breath and is filled with bitterness (9:16-18).

7. He complains again that no one can hold God accountable (9:19b) and says that even though he is in the right and blameless, God would trip him up in any confrontation and end up declaring him guilty (perverse) anyway (9:20). Despite being blameless, Job's suffering has driven him to where he has no regard for his life; indeed, he despises it (9:21).

8. In 9:22-24 he accuses God of treating the just and wicked alike, destroying them both, says he mocks the innocent when they undergo calamity, and says he allows the wicked to get away with evil by covering the faces of the judges. Job is indeed filled with bitterness at this point. As Longman points out (p. 174), Job is here like the psalmist in Psalm 73 before he "had his 'sanctuary experience' in which he sees the glory of God and bows before the mystery of God and recognizes that God will work everything out for good (Ps. 73:17)."

9. In 9:25-31 Job addresses God directly. He says his life is passing swiftly while he is enduring its fleeting span in suffering. Even if he was determined not to complain and to "buck up" in his abject misery, he cannot escape the fear generated by his suffering that he will be condemned, all efforts to vindicate himself proving futile, because God is determined that he will be dirty.

10. In 9:32-35 Job again speaks about rather than to God. He and God are not equals that they could go one-on-one in a court, and there is no arbiter available to level the playing field. If God would cease punishing him and he could be free from his terror, he could then actually present his case without fear. But he is not there now.

11. Job begins chapter 10 with another utterance of despair, a declaration that he hates his life. He says he is going to complain without restraint in the bitterness of his soul. His pain and frustration are pouring out (10:1). He then says he will tell God not to condemn him but instead to declare the basis for his punishment (10:2). After that, he addresses God with a series of accusatory questions suggesting God is unfairly punishing him and in so doing is acting like a mere human (10:3-5).

12. He says God must know he is not guilty, and yet none can rescue him from the unjust punishment he is receiving (10:6-7). He calls God to remember that he made him, gave him life and sustained him (10:8-12), but he says God did so with an intent to scrutinize his life and to crush him whether he was wicked or good (10:13-15). He accuses God of hunting him like a lion and constantly assaulting him (10:16-17). He says he would have been better off if he had been stillborn and went right from the womb to the grave (10:18-19). His plea in 10:20-22 is to be left alone by God, for God to cease inflicting him, during the short time that remains of his life.

13. Unlike the psalmists and prophets who in their suffering express to God their questions, frustrations, and doubts about his faithfulness, love, and commitment to them, Job seems to have abandoned hope.

a. God wants us to be real with him, to speak honestly to him. We know that because Psalms are songs and prayers for the covenant community and they contain such honest and open questioning (e.g., Psalm 77). But God does not want us to grumble to others about him or to cross from doubting him in our suffering to accusing him of wrong or injustice.

b. God rebukes Job in 40:8 for condemning him, and Job ultimately will repent (42:1-6). But even Job's false charge against God was not a disavowal or rejection of God, a cursing of him. It was a cry of cognitive dissonance while holding onto God, an attempt to

make sense of the facts of his (relative) innocence and suffering from within his mistaken retribution theology, the accepted understanding of God's method of operating.

c. Longman states (pp. 281-281):

The difference between "patience" and "endurance" is that the former is a passive waiting, while the latter is active. Job does exhibit endurance (though not patience) throughout the entire book. Even though he complains about God, he never gives up on God; he keeps going after him. . . .

Indeed, it would be wrong to hold up Job of the canonical book as an example of a proper attitude toward God, considering that God himself speaks to him out of the whirlwind and spends four chapters putting him in his place and leading him to "repentance." Certainly that Job never abandoned God but kept pursuing him is a good thing, but not the best thing. Job's attitude at the end, where he finally bows in submission in deference to God and in the face of the mystery of his suffering, is the attitude advocated by the book of Job.

E. Zophar (ch. 11)

1. Zophar responds that Job's foolish talk of being relatively innocent and thus undeserving of his suffering cannot be allowed to stand (vv. 1-3). He says God is unimaginably great and understands all things, including the truth about people's iniquity. If the truth be told, he is exacting from Job *less* than his guilt deserves (vv. 4-11).

2. The problem is Job's foolish resistance to enlightenment (v. 12). If he would acknowledge his sin and repent of it, God would restore him to a blessed state (vv. 13-19). If he will not, all way of escape will be lost (v. 20).

3. Longman comments (pp. 190-191):

Zophar and his friends are totally correct. Sinners need to repent of their sins in order to restore their relationship with God. Page after page of Scripture teaches this important truth. . . . However, Zophar is wrong in this particular case. Job does not have to repent. His suffering has not been caused by his sin. He has nothing to repent of. Indeed, we readers know this without a shadow of a doubt since we are privy to God's discussions with the accuser recorded in the first two chapters of the book.

F. Job (ch. 12-14)

1. Job rebukes his friends for acting as if they are the final voice of wisdom, that nothing is left to be said once they have pronounced on the situation. Contrary to Zophar's suggestion (11:12), Job is not the least bit their intellectual inferior. Indeed, everybody knows God's power and knowledge far exceed that of any mortal, but that is not really the issue (12:1-3).

2. The issue is that Job is a just and blameless man but God has nevertheless punished him like a great sinner, the result of which is that people laugh at him as a hypocrite, a pious fraud. Those who are not being afflicted look down on those who are, believing it is only for those who slip into sin (12:4-5).

3. That God is willing to punish the innocent is implied by the fact he is willing to bless the sinful, to give peace to robbers and security to idolaters (12:6); that is the other side of the injustice coin. Job asserts as fact that this occurs, and says even the beasts, birds, bushes, and fish know that it occurs by God's hand (12:7-9). After all, the life of everything is in his hand (12:10), a declaration that should be accepted by any discerning hearer and one that squares with the wisdom of the aged (12:11-12).

4. The blessing of the sinful (and by implication the punishment of the righteous) obviously is by God's hand because his power is such that no intention of his can be subverted, stalled, or thwarted (12:13-25). If he did not want robbers to be at peace and idolaters to be secure, they would not be.

5. Job repeats that his friends are in no way his superiors in the matter of wisdom (13:1-2). He wants an audience with God, to come before him to present his case, but his friends whitewash the situation. They lie about Job's sinfulness to cover up the inconvenient truth that God is punishing a righteous man (13:3-4). They are so wrong that the wise thing for them to do is to shut their mouths (13:5).

6. In 13:6-12 he asks if they will lie for God, if they will act as unscrupulous advocates for him who twist the truth in his favor. He warns them that God knows the truth and will not be pleased with their partiality, their unfair assessment of his situation. He says God will rebuke them for what they are doing, that his dread will fall on them, which happens in 42:7. He says in v. 12 that their words have no substance.

7. As Longman (p. 208) summarizes 13:13-19, "Job expresses his determination to press his case against God even though he thinks his chances are slight or even nil. Nevertheless, he wants to go in and confront God's treatment of him in light of his (innocent and blameless) behavior."

a. The two proverbial expressions in 13:14 are obscure, but it seems clear they mean to put something valuable at risk. This is clearly the meaning of putting one's life in one's hands in Judg. 12:3, 1 Sam. 19:5, 28:21, so presumably it also is the meaning of the former. Putting flesh in teeth is to put it at risk of being consumed.

b. The translation of 13:15 is notoriously difficult and the scholarly renderings vary, but what seems to fit the context best is something like, "Though he slay me, I have no other hope; nevertheless [despite that risk], I will defend my ways before him." Job believes God may well reject his case despite his innocence because he is convinced God is quite capable of punishing the righteous. He is nevertheless resigned to proceed because he currently is being crushed and presenting his case before God seems to be the only option.

c. From Job's current perspective of God, born of prolonged suffering, going before him with an accusation of wrongdoing carries an anxiety beyond what the lowliest of subjects would have felt in daring to go before a king like Nebuchadnezzar with a charge of wrongdoing. Only someone desperate would even contemplate such a thing.

d. In 13:16 Job seems to be saying that whatever should happen, his appearing before God will be his victory (*yěshu'ah*), his deliverance from scorn, in the sense it will prove his claim of being righteous was true because no godless man would dare to do so. This fits with Job's loud and bold declaration to his friends in 13:17-19 of his determination to press forward.

8. In 13:20-28 Job addresses God directly. He tells him he will be able to interact with him, to present his case before him, if he will stop harming and scaring him. In that event, Job will ask for an accounting of his sins that justify his suffering, an explanation of why God treats him as an enemy. He suggests it is beneath God to frighten one as frail and weakened as he is and then represents the kind of pain God is inflicting on him by referring to incarceration and to restricting his movement by cutting his feet. Verse 28 reflects Job's sense of wasting away at the hands of God, which he generalizes to mankind.

9. In 14:1-6 Job says human life is brief and full of hardship, and then after emphasizing its brevity, complains generally that God scrutinizes human lives so closely and specifically that God condemns him. Such focus and attention seems out of keeping with the insignificance of mankind's fleeting life. No man can free himself of all sin, bring a completely clean life from an unclean nature, but where is the justice in zeroing in on the failings of the relatively righteous (Job) for purpose of punishment while allowing the wicked to escape unscathed? Given the brevity of human life, Job calls for God to cease his punishing scrutiny that mankind (particularly Job) at least may find a "joy" comparable to that of a hired laborer, may experience only the normal hardships of life rather than the extraordinary affliction of God's select punishment.

10. The point of 14:7-12 is that giving man some peace in his brief life is all the more important because, unlike a felled tree, death is not a mere state of dormancy from which one emerges to live again. Job seems to understand death as a permanent condition, to believe that this life is all there is.

a. His statement that the dead man will not awaken "until the heavens are no more" possibly means death will only be reversed at some unknown future point beyond history, a time of such radical transformation that the entire cosmos ceases to exist in its present state. But the context favors the view that "until the heavens are no more" is an idiom of permanence, something comparable to our "until hell freezes over." In other words, Job is bolstering his appeal for God to give man some peace in his short life because when it is over it is over.

b. Job's lack of awareness of the resurrection is not shocking given the likely pre-patriarchal setting of the story. This is a truth God revealed over time. Job clearly is incorrect or uninformed about other things he says, so his ignorance on this point is not unique.

The normative message of the inspired book is not everything Job or his friends utter but the perspective God brings to their entire dialogue at the end.

11. Though he believes death is permanent, Job says in 14:13-17 that he would relish the prospect of God taking his life, "hiding him" in Sheol in the sense he there would be away from God's punishing attention, and then restoring his life after God's wrath against him had passed. I think verse 16 is best rendered in NET (see also REB, NJB, and Longman): "Surely now you count my steps; then you would not mark my sin," the meaning being that the critical scrutiny to which God is now subjecting his life would not exist on his imagined return from Sheol after God's wrath had passed. Verse 17 further describes this different perspective toward him that he would welcome from God. Longman states (p. 214), Job "continues his wish for a future in which God overlooks his sins rather than being so precise in his attention to them."

12. In 14:18-22 Job moves from his wish that God would put him in temporary hibernation in Sheol until his anger passed to the reality of what he is experiencing. As natural forces grind down a mountain, God grinds down human hope by afflicting them, changing a man's countenance from joyful hope to fear, anxiety, and depression, and he then sends them to Sheol. While they suffer with whatever debilitating condition characterizes the end of their lives, they are so focused on their own suffering that they are not even aware of their children's lives.

Longman on the Human Condition (pp. 218-219):

So why is life short and hard? The answer comes in Gen. 3 when Adam and Eve rebel against God. They replace God's sovereignty with their own. By eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, they try to define their own moral standards and not allow God to do so. The consequence is death and suffering. Humans are alienated from God, from each other, from creation, and even from themselves.

So why do humans experience suffering? Because of sin. Now I am beginning to sound like one of the three friends: Job is suffering because of sin. However, I have repeatedly emphasized in this commentary and will do so till the end, the book of Job makes very clear that Job is "innocent and virtuous, fearing God and turning away from sin" (1:1 and elsewhere). We lose our way in the book of Job if we ever forget that Job is not personally responsible for his suffering.

On the other hand, there would be no suffering and death apart from sin (Rom. 5:12-21). What the story of Job undermines is the belief that all of our suffering and pain and our death are the direct result of our own personal sin. It keeps us from looking at someone who is sick, poor, or depressed and asking, "What did they do to deserve this?" The book, though, is not denying that it is human rebellion that has marred life and brought death into the world.

#### IV. Second Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 15-21)

##### A. Eliphaz (ch. 15)

1. Eliphaz opens his second speech by insulting Job as being full of hot air and rebuking him for speaking without proper reverence toward God (15:1-6). In 15:7-10 he charges Job with being arrogant, acting like he has a special pipeline to God and knows more than everyone including the prior generations.

2. Eliphaz chides Job for rejecting the comforts or consolations of God given to him presumably through Eliphaz's first speech, specifically in the message Eliphaz had been given by a spirit that all humans are guilty of sin (4:7-12). Eliphaz sees this message as comforting and gentle in that it supports the notion Job is being punished for his sin, by implication from the fact Job like all humans is a sinner, and thus points to the solution to his plight in the form of repentance. He asks why Job is angry and driven to speak against God rather than acknowledge his sin given the corruption and injustice that characterize mankind generally. Why be so adamant in his claim of innocence in the face of humanity's track record, especially when the result is to accuse God of injustice? (15:11-16).

3. In 15:17-24 he appeals to his personal observations and the wisdom of their forefathers in asserting that it is the wicked who suffer. The enigmatic statement in v. 19b that no stranger passed in the midst of these forefathers probably is a way of suggesting they were so insightful that no one was a stranger in the sense no one was unknown to them; they quickly could discern the truth about everyone.

4. In 15:25-35 Eliphaz declares that the wicked will suffer because they defy God, and he elaborates on the horrors they will experience. He is trying to drive Job to repentance because he views Job as Exhibit A; in Eliphaz's eyes, Job is suffering so horribly because he is wicked.

5. Eliphaz was so fixed in his mistaken theology that nothing he witnessed in life and no protestations of innocence would make a dent. Wherever he saw abnormal suffering he "knew" it was God's punishment for sinfulness, so all contrary indications were dismissed summarily. Longman contrasts this with the psalmist in Psalm 73. He too accepted retribution theology, but he was willing to acknowledge what he saw, that the wicked do indeed seem to prosper in this life. This threw him into confusion, which caused him almost to stumble (Ps. 73:2-3), but he was driven by that to an encounter with God in which he came to a deeper understanding of God's retribution for sin. As Longman states (p. 231), "He came to understand that there are not perfect and immediate consequences for sin and righteousness in the present, but in the end everyone does get what they deserve." Longman is, of course, not denying salvation by grace but saying only that those who are faithful to God and thus live righteously will one day be perfectly distinguished from those who are not faithful to God and thus live unrighteously.

## B. Job (ch. 16-17)

1. Job begins his next speech by insulting his friends for their trite responses that fail to comfort and lack insight; they give only "windy words." If their situations were reversed, he easily could berate them and view them with contempt, but he claims he would instead

strengthen and comfort them. Since his pain remains whether he speaks or stays silent, he might as well keep speaking. (16:1-6)

2. In 16:7-14 Job gives his perception of God's attitude toward and his assault upon him. God hates him and has come after him "hammer and tong," which suffering indicates to others that he is an extraordinary sinner, one who deserves such punishment. They thus despise and attack him, those who are less righteous than he.

3. In 16:15-16 he describes his mourning and grief over his harsh treatment. In verse 17 he again makes clear that his suffering is undeserved: there is no violence in his hands and his prayer is pure.

4. In 16:18 he appeals for his cry for justice not to be silenced or exhausted. Following Clines's translation of some very difficult Hebrew, Job says in 16:19-21<sup>2</sup> that the claims he has made in this dialogue, his protestations of innocence, are even now standing as his witness in heaven, serving as an advocate of his righteousness. Though a poor substitute for a personal confrontation with God, "[t]he truth about his innocence has been placed on record in the heavenly court" (Clines, 1:390). And against hope, he sleeplessly awaits a fair hearing of his case. He will be dead in a few years at most (16:22), but the cry for justice he has set forth shall stand.

5. In 17:1-2 Job says he is broken and near death and is being provoked by the mockers who surround him. In 17:3-4 he calls on God to vouch for his innocence, to put up a pledge on his behalf, because it was God who eliminated all human supporters (turned them into mockers) by blinding their minds to his innocence through punishing him so severely. It is a way of complaining about what God has done, like saying God owes him that for having mistreated him. The last clause of 17:4 is perhaps best translated as "you will not be exalted" (see Clines, Hartley, Balentine), being Job's claim that God will not be exalted for having so blinded people's minds to his innocence. He will not be exalted for that because in Job's current state of mind God was wrong to do it.

6. Verse 5 is also obscure. The Hebrew literally reads (Balentine, 261): "For a portion (*heleq*) he tells friends, and the eyes of his children fail." With Clines and others, it is best understood as a proverb along the lines: "[They are like] a man bidding his friends to a feast while his children are starving." The point is that the friends who are condemning Job put up appearances of having plenty of wisdom when in reality their cupboards are bare.

7. In 17:6-7 Job bemoans the fact that in the eyes of his community he has become a living illustration of the consequences of sin, one who is viewed with utter contempt. The emotional torment caused by the community's disdain is wearing him out.

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<sup>2</sup> Clines translates: "Even now my witness is in heaven, my advocate is on high. It is my cry that is my spokesman; sleeplessly I wait for God's reply. It will argue a mortal's case before God as a man argues for his friend." Longman rejects this translation on the basis Job's cry for justice cannot serve as an arbitrator between Job and God because an arbitrator is a third party. But Clines renders the key clause in v. 21 as "It will *argue* . . . before God" instead of "He would *arbitrate* with God."

8. Job says in 17:8-9 that the righteous man is appalled at the horror of Job's suffering and, seeing it as an example of what sinfulness brings, is roused by it to even greater opposition to the ungodly. Thus, Job's suffering, misinterpreted through the lens of absolutist retribution theology, confirms or strengthens the righteous person's commitment to that understanding. They have a self-fulfilling perspective from which they will not be shaken.

9. In 17:10-12 Job says none of his three friends is a true wise man (v. 10), expresses his hopelessness (v. 11), and rebukes his friends for calling night day, for claiming that the injustice done to him is really justice, and for insisting that light is at hand if he will just repent (v. 12). In 17:13-16 he says despairingly that if he hopes for death, which he does as the only way to be freed from his suffering, then any hope for vindication in this world will die with him. When he is dead, he will be cut off from the living, those he wants to know the truth about his righteousness.

### C. Bildad (ch. 18)

1. In 18:1-4 Bildad asks how long Job will keep talking and advises him to give more thought before speaking. He rebukes Job for treating them as stupid and tells him that all his railing will not change the reality of his situation (will not cause the world to be abandoned or great rocks to be uplifted), which for Bildad is that that extreme suffering is a mark of sinfulness.

2. The remainder of ch. 18 (vv. 5-21) is a description of the kind of bad things that are in store for the wicked. They may flourish for a season, but their lives, according to Bildad, will take a dreadful turn, as had happened to Job. The reality, however, as lamented by Qohelet (e.g., Eccles. 8:10), is that the wicked sometimes are healthy, wealthy, and happy throughout their lives. Suffering for the wicked in this life is not a guaranteed or absolute outcome. Neither is avoidance of suffering for the righteous a guaranteed or absolute outcome; other things can come into play. But Bildad and his friends do not seem to recognize that possibility as they jump from Job's suffering to the conclusion he is sinful.

### D. Job (ch. 19)

1. In 19:1-3 Job complains about how they are emotionally tormenting him, heaping shame on him by insisting he is evil and only getting his just desserts. He says in v. 4 that even if he did something wrong, that's on him, as we would say. In other words, his wrong and its consequences would not involve them so they would have no business "piling on" to add to his suffering.

2. Job says in 19:5-7 that if they insist on coming at him full bore and using his disgrace as proof of his sinfulness, they need to know that God is already attacking him without mercy despite the justness of his cause. In 19:8-12 he portrays God's assault on him, and then in 19:13-19 he speaks of his total abandonment by family, friends, guests, acquaintances, servants, and even young children. He is wrongly despised by everyone as a hypocrite who is getting his comeuppance.

3. In 19:20 Job speaks of his dire physical condition and how he has barely escaped death. In 19:21-22 he begs for their pity as one who has been so ferociously targeted by God. He asks why they continue after him and are not satisfied with the suffering God already has inflicted upon him.

4. Verses 23-29 are notoriously difficult, and there is much disagreement over the translation and meaning of certain verses. My understanding has been shaped by the insights of David Clines (p. 457-462) and Samuel Balentine (p. 299-300).

a. In 19:23-25 Job expresses his longing that his protestations of innocence and cry for justice be inscribed in stone (filled in with molten lead) as a permanent monument to his righteousness (vv. 23-24). But even without that (taking *waw* at beginning of v. 25 as "but"), he knows that his redeemer lives in the sense he knows his verbal proclamation of innocence, now standing as his witness in heaven (16:19), ultimately will be acknowledged as true and thus ultimately will induce his vindication or redemption from the community's slanderous judgments about his character (v. 25). The problem according to 19:26a is that he believes this will happen only after he is dead, after his skin has been destroyed, whereas according to 19:26b-27b he *wants* it to happen during his life, when he would see God with his own eyes. He wants to receive vindication before he is gone but is convinced he will not. (Of course, Job proves wrong in that regard.)

b. The word "redeemer" is *gō'ēl*. It typically refers to a "kinsman redeemer," the nearest male relative who comes to the aid of a distressed family member, but it sometimes is applied to God as the one who comes to the aid of his people. Despite the fact "redeemer" is capitalized in a number of English versions, I think Job's cry for justice is personified and cast in that role. Clines states (pp. 459-460):

Why should Job here call his deposition of character (which is the content of his "cry") his *gō'ēl*, when in chap. 16 he had used more exclusively legal terms? The reason is plain from the context. This is the chapter in which he has most extensively elaborated his desertion by his relatives and acquaintances (vv 13-19). Not one of them wants anything to do with him, and he is bereft of any personal *gō'ēl* who might defend his cause. God is his enemy, so he has no one to rely on except himself. He has to be his own *gō'ēl* . . . Indeed, he objectifies his protestation of innocence into an entity that has something of an existence of its own and now dwells in the heavenly realm where there is a better chance of encounter with God. But that is no more than an image for the fact that Job himself has spoken, has challenged God to a lawsuit, and has presented his own affidavit of innocence. This remains a fact, whatever happens to Job himself; his words cannot be unspoken, and they indeed go on speaking for him as his kinsman champion.

c. Though it is certainly true that Jesus is our redeemer and that we know he lives, with the vast majority of scholars, I do not believe Job is referring to Jesus in v. 25. Indeed, the redeemer of which Job speaks is something (or someone) that ultimately brings

vindication from a God who in Job's perspective is reluctant to give it. For Job, the two are pitted against each other, which does not fit comfortably with God's redemption through Christ.

d. In 19:27c Job voices the emotional exhaustion that his unmet longing for vindication and relief has produced in him. In 19:28-29 he warns his friends that if they refuse to back off, if they insist on slandering him under their false belief that he is the cause of his suffering (the root of the matter is found in him), they are doing wrong and thereby putting themselves in jeopardy of the punishment they are convinced flows absolutely and mechanically to the sinner. In that case, they will know by experience that there is judgment.

#### E. Zophar (ch. 20)

1. In 20:1-3 Zophar says he is worked up by Job's words that insult him and feels compelled to respond. He claims his response is really not his own but that of some kind of spiritual authority that has given him insight.

2. In 20:4-29 he asserts in different ways that the wicked suffer and that any prosperity or good things they may enjoy is short lived. Bildad made the same points in chapter 18.

3. Again, as indicated in various proverbs and psalms (e.g., Prov. 13:11, 21:6, 11:18; Ps. 73), the prosperity of the wicked often is temporary in this life, but it is a mistake to think that is an absolute rule. There are many exceptions, cases in which the wicked have good things throughout their earthly lives (Eccles. 8:10). Of course, even when the wicked enjoy good things throughout their earthly lives that prosperity is still temporary when measured against their continuing life after death, so in that broader sense the rule is absolute. But Job and his friends do not think in those terms, as God in pre-patriarchal times (the setting of Job) had not yet revealed with any clarity the nature of the afterlife and the truth of the resurrection.

#### F. Job (ch. 21)

1. In 21:1-3 Job calls his friends to listen to what he is saying, to let that be their act of comfort toward him. Let them hear him out, and then they can ridicule him.

2. In 21:4-5 Job indicates by a rhetorical question that his complaint is against God not mere men. He says he has reason to be impatient, as will be obvious if they will just look at his horrible condition.

3. In 21:6 Job trembles at the thought that there is no justice, that God does not punish the wicked and bless the righteous. He then asserts in 21:7-17, similar to Qohelet (Eccles. 8:10) and in contradiction of Zophar, that the wicked, those who are contemptuous of God, thrive in this life. By Job's lights, God is unconcerned with their conduct.

4. In 21:18-21 he says the wicked should be blown away. He rejects the notion that God's failure to punish the wicked can be justified by the claim he punishes the children of

the wicked. The wrongdoer should be the one who is punished, and it means nothing to the wrongdoer to punish his offspring after he is dead.

5. The point of 21:22-26 is that, from Job's perspective, blessing and bitterness in life are apportioned by God without rhyme or reason. One man has a life of abundance and another a life of want, and then they both die, but there is no discernible rationale for the distinction.

6. In 21:27 Job says he knows his friends are not interested in consoling him but hurting him. In 21:28-33 he tells them the evidence for the wicked prospering is abundant. They could ask any passerby on the road. There are many cases of wicked people having good things throughout their lives, and they even have grand and respectful burials. He says in 21:34 that his friends are worthless comforters who are just pushing lies.

## V. Third Cycle of Dialogues or Speeches (ch. 22-31)

### A. Eliphaz (ch. 22)

1. In 22:1-4 Eliphaz asserts that human behavior does not contribute anything to God; it does not add to him or fill any kind of lack. If, for example, Job was righteous as he claims, it would (according to Eliphaz who knows nothing of the events of chapters 1 and 2) not be to God's benefit. The rather obscure implication of the assertion that human behavior gives nothing to God seems to be that no human can put God in his debt and thus that no human can make God his instrument for punishing a righteous man. God is above all human manipulation, and since that is so and he is just, Job's suffering is judgment for his sinfulness not his piety.

2. In 22:5-9 Eliphaz proceeds to accuse Job of all sorts of sins in an attempt to justify Job's suffering. He claims Job mistreated the poor, the powerless, the widows, and the orphans, all of which is false. He says expressly in 22:10-11 that this is why Job is suffering.

3. In 22:12-14 Eliphaz says Job claims that God is ignorant of what goes on in the world, the implication being that Job's punishment is a misjudgment born of that ignorance. Whereas Job does wonder whether God knows his situation, he apparently, as Longman notes (p. 289), "suspects that God does indeed know what is going on but does not care, since God is unjust, judging the innocent and the wicked the same (9:15-21)."

4. In 22:15-20 he says that Job, in insisting the wicked prosper throughout their lives, is falling in line with the common delusion of the guilty that they will escape God's judgment. The reality, however, is that whatever prosperity they temporarily enjoyed from God's hand is washed away in the river of his judgment that destroys their foundation. Eliphaz claims to stand with the righteous who rejoice at the wicked person's ultimate comeuppance.

5. In 22:21-30 Eliphaz appeals to Job to humble himself and repent. He will then be restored to blessings and abundance.

## B. Job (ch. 23-24)

1. In 23:1-7 Job speaks of his suffering and then fantasizes about calling God to account for his unjust treatment of him and being vindicated through that encounter. He says in 23:8-9 that he cannot find God to press his case before him, but God knows where he is (23:10a), and Job is confident that if God will test him he will pass with flying colors (23:10b).

2. Job is confident of the outcome of that encounter because, as he says in 23:11-12, he is righteous. He has held to God's way and God's word.

3. In 23:13-16 Job shifts from how he would like his encounter with God to be to the reality of his emotions. God is unlike any other being, which introduces a kind of wild-card factor into encountering him, and the fact he is all powerful combines with his inscrutability to terrify Job. Nevertheless, he says in 23:17 that he will not let his terror and dread keep him from setting his case before the Almighty.

4. In 24:1 Job asks why God is not acting in a timely manner against the wicked, contrary to the expectation of his friends' notion of retributive justice. He then, in 24:2-17, gives a list of crimes of the wicked, which includes in vv. 5-8 and vv. 10-12 a portrait of the pitiable condition of the orphan, widow, poor, and needy upon whom the wicked prey. The wicked carry on with seeming impunity while the pleas of the suffering go unheeded (v. 12).

5. In 24:18-20 Job says his friends claim that the wicked have a short and cursed life on earth. He counters this in 24:21-24 claiming that God prolongs their lives and gives them security until they die in keeping with the lot of all mankind, without experiencing any kind of exceptional end. In 24:25 Job challenges them to deny what he has just said.

## C. Bildad (ch. 25)

1. The point of Bildad's short speech is that God is so magnificent that no human can be righteous or pure before him. Indeed, he says humans are maggots or worms in God's sight. So it is absurd for Job to claim he could vindicate himself by establishing his righteousness if only he could get an audience with God.

2. Of course, mankind in its fallen state is twisted and alienated from God, and in that sense can justify the deprecating and even revolting image of maggots and worms (see Isa. 41:14), but it is important to recognize that the image of God in mankind is not extinguished. Humans were the pinnacle of creation, and we are the physical creatures with whom God intends to share his love forever. For all our warts, we remain precious in his sight, the primary object of his redemptive work.

3. Contrary to Bildad, the question about Job's suffering is not whether any human is sinless, is absolutely righteous or pure such that he could stand before God as a worthy being. Rather, the question is why Job, who is in fact relatively righteous (Job 1:1, 1:8, 2:3), is suffering so greatly, why he is suffering like the greatest of sinners. Job, who knows he is relatively

righteous, insists God is unjust; his friends, who reason from the fact he is suffering intensely, insist Job is a sinner.

#### D. Job (ch. 26-31)

1. In 26:1-4 Job blasts his friends with rhetorical questions indicating their advice has been worthless. Their words certainly have not come from God.

2. In 26:5-13 Job speaks of God's fear-inspiring awesomeness and the great power manifested in his works. He can affirm those truths as well as his friends; God's greatness and power are not the issue. Some of the verses warrant special comment.

a. He says in v. 5 that the dead tremble, as do the waters and their inhabitants, because there is no hiding from God even in the realm of the dead.

b. He refers in v. 10 to God's establishment of the horizon, which encircles the earthly observer, and describes it as a boundary of light and darkness. From an earthly perspective, daylight rises from below the eastern horizon, chasing the darkness away, that is, below the horizon, and it descends below the western horizon, surrendering to the spread of darkness above the horizon.

c. The "pillars of heaven" that in v. 11 tremble and are amazed at God's rebuke is a poetic reference to the mountains. These great formations reach to the clouds as though supporting the vault of the sky.

d. The reference in vv. 12-13 to defeat of Rahab and the fleeing serpent is another reference to pagan creation mythology. As I said in reference to 9:13, even if Job believed the pagan myth was true, rather than simply using a culturally known story to make a point, *God* does not say the myth was true. Job and his friends (especially his friends) are presented in the book as wisdom teachers who have a lot to learn. Their discussion is really a foil for the normative teaching of the book.

3. In 26:14 Job says the greatness and power of God that he just laid out was a mere sketch, something that just touched the hem of the garment. His power is beyond comprehension.

4. In 27:1-6 Job swears by the living God, who he adds has denied him justice and made him bitter, that as long as he lives he will not deny the truth that he is righteous. Despite how his friends may badger him, he will not abandon his integrity in the matter and embrace a lie.

5. In 27:7-10 Job expresses his desire for God to treat his *enemies* as the wicked and unrighteous instead of unfairly treating *him* that way. As Job knows, when God treats one as wicked and unrighteous, as he thinks God has done wrongly to him, it is a hopeless crushing. He wants God's judgment trained in the right direction; he is the good guy!

6. In 27:11 Job tells them he will teach them how God really works in the world; he will not conceal it from them. Before getting to that, he chastises them in 27:12-23. He takes what his friends insist they have seen (v. 12a), God invariably punishing the wicked (v. 13), which punishment he details in vv. 14-23 echoing their claims about the fate of the wicked, and asks why in light of that alleged observation they have become altogether vain (v. 12b), why they have become like the wicked in speaking nonsense about Job's situation. If they truly were wise, their conviction about God invariably punishing the wicked in the ways they claim should have kept them from their vain (false and thus unrighteous) accusations against him.

7. Many scholars insist chapter 28 contradicts the sentiments expressed by Job elsewhere, and therefore they relocate the chapter, claim it was a disjointed insertion by a later editor who wanted to soften Job's bold words, or assign its words to the book's narrator. But there is no textual support for those moves, and I think they are unnecessary. I do not believe Job is here acknowledging and bowing before the Lord's vastly superior knowledge and wisdom and thus already accepting the perspective of the book's end. Rather, I think he confesses God as the source of all true wisdom to raise and reset the issue that bedevils him, namely that God has defined wisdom for mankind but has reneged on that definition in Job's case. That is why Job immediately launches back into complaints about his life in chapters 29-31.

8. In 28:1-11 he says mankind has an unprecedented ability among God's creatures to ferret out precious metals and stones from the earth. Humans are energetic and ingenious in that regard, whereas the animal kingdom is oblivious.

9. Yet, he says in 28:12-19, we have no comparable appreciation for or skill in obtaining wisdom, which is far more valuable. Indeed, wisdom is seemingly inaccessible (28:20-22), but of course, God knows all about it because he is omniscient (28:23-24). So one can do no better than to rely on what God says about wisdom.

10. The problem Job is having is with what God revealed to man early on about the essence of wisdom and understanding. He said the fear of the Lord is wisdom and turning away from evil is understanding (28:28), the implication being that the one who lived a life of faithfulness and submission, who lived with wisdom and understanding as defined by God, would stay on the path of God's blessing and protection. That was the understood fruit of the wise living God prescribed; that is why it was wise. It is the failure of this to be true in Job's case that fuels his sense of injustice. He is a paragon of righteousness, and yet he is suffering like the greatest of fools, like those who have no fear of the Lord and wallow in evil. That, according to Job, is the fact about how God works in the world.

11. Job makes this point as he resumes speaking in chapter 29. He lived in fear of the Lord and turned from evil, but now he is left to long for the days before his suffering, the days when he received the expected fruit of wise and understanding living. He indicates in 29:1-11 that in bygone days he was blessed by God and respected and honored among men because, he says in 29:12-17, he lived righteously, helping all the needy and opposing the unrighteous. At that time, he says in 29:18-20, he thought he would live a long life full of good things. In 29:21-25 he speaks again of the blessedness of his former days.

12. In chapter 30 Job laments his present state. He says in 30:1-15 that even children of his social inferiors laugh at him, and those who have been banished to living in the wilderness mock him in song, avoid him, and spit at the sight of him. Because of what God has done to him, he is despised and thus has lost all the social protection his status afforded him; it is now open season on him.

13. In 30:16-19 Job says his life is being drained from him by his persistent pain and suffering. God has powerfully seized him and thrown him in the mud, subjected him to abject humiliation. In 30:20-23 he complains that God does not respond to him. He says God has become cruel toward him, tossing him about in a storm, and is taking him to his death.

14. In 30:24-26 Job says those suffering through a disaster cry out for help and that he wept for the hurting and grieved for the needy. But when he cried out in his suffering hoping for good and waiting for light, only bad things and darkness came. The not so subtle implication is that God has failed to have the same compassion as Job.

15. In 30:27-31 Job speaks of his turmoil, physical suffering, disfigurement, abandonment, and mourning. He is getting the hammer in spades.

16. In chapter 31 Job lays out his righteousness in protest of the treatment he has received. He says in 31:1-4 that he kept himself from lusting after young women in the belief God punishes the unrighteous. He says in 31:5-8 that if he were a wicked person – a liar, a deceiver, one who followed his own desires rather than God's, or one who had unclean hands – he would accept the punishment he deserved. As he indicates in v. 6, what he wants are honest scales, a fair judgment of the matter.

17. Job continues in that same vein throughout the chapter. He says in 31:9-12 that if he pursued his neighbor's wife, then he deserves for others to have his wife. That would be a terrible crime, something punishable by the judges and something that would rightfully destroy whatever he had achieved in his life.

18. He says in 31:13-15 that if he had not treated the complaints of his servants fairly he would have no defense when God, the protector of the socially vulnerable, came against him. Before God, all people are equal, as he made them all, so a superior social position provides no justification for abusing or exploiting others. Job had not done that.

19. He says in 31:16-23 that he would deserve punishment if he had neglected or mistreated the poor or needy, the widow or orphan. But he did not, for he feared the wrath of God.

20. He says in 31:24-28 that he never defrauded God by giving his trust and allegiance to wealth or to some astral deity like the Sun or Moon. He did not take on false gods.

21. He says in 31:29-40 that he would deserve punishment if he rejoiced when disaster struck those who hated him or had cursed them, if he had not been generous and hospitable, if he had hidden his sin, or if he had taken crops from his land without paying those

who were owed for them. But he had not done that. He interjects in 31:35-37 his longing for an audience with God. He wants a hearing because he is being wronged!

22. The end of verse 40 says, "The words of Job are ended," meaning this is the end of his interaction with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. God will respond to Job's words, but first a previously unmentioned bystander, Elihu, jumps into the dispute.

## VI. Elihu's Speech (ch. 32-37)

A. 32:1-5 – These verses are a narrative introduction. Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite (v. 6), comes out of nowhere. He was a silent observer of the dispute between Job and his three friends because he was young and deferred to his elders. But he can remain silent no longer. The three friends had given up, ceased to answer Job (32:1), without having convinced him that he was in the wrong. Elihu cannot tolerate this failure to convict Job of his culpability in the suffering that had befallen him. Job held to his innocence and accused God of injustice in his case, making himself more righteous than God, and Elihu is incensed. That simply cannot be allowed to stand. Elihu is angry with Job and with the three friends for failing to make him "cry uncle."

B. 32:6-10 – Elihu says he was afraid to pipe up because of his youth, and then he announces there really was no basis for his reluctance to speak because wisdom is not a matter of age but of divine inspiration. He says in v. 8 that it is the "breath of the Almighty" that gives understanding, meaning in contrast to the experience and observation of a long life and the collective insight of prior generations (tradition of the elders). Old people are not privileged regarding wisdom: "It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right" (32:9). Rather it is those, like him, who have been gifted with divine insight. That is why they need to listen to him (32:10) despite his youth.

C. 32:11-22 – Elihu says he was disappointed in their failure to convict Job and in their becoming discouraged and giving up before having done so (32:11-15). Their giving up helped motivate him to intervene (32:16-17). He says in v. 14b that he will not answer Job with their speeches, meaning with the same arguments, but that is basically what he does. He claims he is about to burst. Under the compulsion of the Spirit, he must speak (32:18-20), and he will tell it straight, using neither flattery nor favoritism (32:21-22).

### D. 33:1-11

1. Elihu is not only young but appears to be quite full of himself. He tells Job to "listen up" as he is going to speak to him with no deceit or hidden agenda (33:1-3). He refers again to his connection with the Spirit of God and calls Job to take his stand and answer him if he can (33:4-5). He then patronizingly assures Job that he need not fear him because he is only a man like Job (33:6-7).

2. Elihu says he heard what Job said (33:8), and then he misrepresents him (33:9-11). Job never said, 'I am pure, without transgression; I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me' but still God punishes me (33:9-11). Longman comments (p. 385-386):

However, it is not fair to say that Job represented himself as "pure," "without transgression," "clean," or having "no guilt." Job once calls his prayer "pure" (16:17), but never himself. It is only Bildad (8:6) and Zophar (11:4) who use the word "pure" (*zak*), and they too use it in contexts where they are saying that Job claims to be pure. In a similar vein, Job never claims to be "clean" (*hap*) elsewhere.

Job never claims to be absolutely without transgression (*peša*) or guilt either. Indeed, in 7:21 he asks why God just doesn't pardon his transgression and guilt. In 14:17 Job wishes that God would cover over his transgressions and guilt so they would not affect his relationship with him. In 31:33 Job protests that he has not been the type of person who tries to hide his transgressions. The closest that Job comes to denying transgression, guilt, and sin for that matter is in 13:23, but there Job is asking God to inform him of the faults that have led to his suffering so that he can counter the charges.

Elihu has misconstrued Job's position (as the three friends did earlier). Job is not saying he is without sin (see also 9:2). His claim is that his sin does not deserve the level of suffering that he presently experiences. He is arguing that his suffering is not the result of sin. And in this we know he is correct, and the three friends and Elihu are all horribly wrong.

3. Elihu is correct, however, in saying that Job claims God has become his enemy and put his feet in stocks (33:10-11). Job says that explicitly (13:24, 27). Job agrees with retribution theology, that suffering is the result of sin, so since he is suffering horribly despite being righteous, he believes God is acting against him on trumped up charges.

#### E. 33:12-30

1. Elihu says flat out that Job is wrong in claiming his suffering is not his fault (33:12a). He takes umbrage that Job would dare to cast blame on God (33:12b-13). He says God speaks to humans in various ways, but people often do not perceive what he is saying (33:14). God warns them in dreams to turn them from conduct that will lead to death (33:15-18). He likewise "speaks" by disciplining them with suffering, and more specifically with sickness (33:19-22).

2. Elihu elaborates on the restoration process that occurs in the latter case (33:23-26), presumably because he is implying that is Job's situation. He says if there be a messenger (an angel), one of the many (the thousand) available for the task, who will tell the sufferer what is right for him – tell him what he needs to do, which is repent, and presumably be heeded – then God will spare him from death by forgiving him (applying the unidentified ransom). The sick person thus will be fully restored to health. He will then pray to God as one restored to his favor, and he will see God's face with joy, for God restores to man his righteousness (see NKJV for final clause).

3. The restored man will sing before men and say: "I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me. He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit,

and my life shall look upon the light" (33:27-28). The last clause is a declaration that he will live a faithful life, one lived in consciousness of God and his way.

4. God does this repeatedly for a person to spare his life (33:29-30), so contrary to Job's charge, God is not an enemy but the most faithful of friends. He is disciplining him for his own good. Note that the three friends also occasionally expressed this viewpoint (5:17-22). It is true that God sometimes works this way (e.g., Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-13). As C. S. Lewis put it in *The Problem of Pain*, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

5. But Elihu is mistaken in suggesting that is what is going on in Job's case. Longman comments (p. 390):

Elihu has just argued that God uses suffering to discipline his people so they will not continue on a path that will end with their death. Now this argument differs from the argument that suffering is simply punishment for sin, but both viewpoints assume that the sufferer is a sinner. Elihu apparently believes just as much as the three friends do that Job is a sinner. He believes Job is wrong to disconnect his suffering from his own sin (33:12). His desire is for Job to own up to his responsibility.

F. 33:31-33 – Elihu again tells Job to "listen up," and promises to teach him wisdom. Verse 32 gives an exception. If Job has anything to say that is truly exculpatory, such as confessing his fault, then Elihu wants him to speak up because he desires his acquittal or vindication.

G. 34:1-6 – Elihu calls for the wise to judge between his position and Job's. He says Job claims that he is righteous but that God is treating him unjustly, punishing him as though his claim to be righteous is a lie. The claim in v. 6 that Job says he is "without transgression" is a misrepresentation if taken literally, but it is otherwise a fair assessment of Job's position.

H. 34:7-9 – He says Job is impervious to the correcting effect of scorn; on the contrary, he drinks it like water. He accuses Job of being an evildoer and charges Job with denying there is any benefit in serving God. Job does not say that explicitly, but Elihu infers it from Job's insistence that God is pummeling him despite his faithful service.

I. 34:10-12 – Despite having claimed he would not argue as the three friends, Elihu proceeds to make the same fundamental claim they made: God treats people according to their actions. Contrary to Job's charge, God does not twist justice, which would be a wicked thing and make him guilty.

J. 34:13-15 – He says that God is sovereign and sustains the world. The implication being that he is too great to be guilty of wrong as Job suggests.

K. 34:16-30 – Elihu rebukes Job for claiming God hates justice, for making such a charge against one who is righteous and mighty and who governs impartially (34:17-19). God sees all of

man's steps, however they may try to hide, and those who are evildoers die by his hand regardless of whether they are rich and powerful. He has no need for an investigation because he knows their works, and he crushes them publicly because of their evil in doing such things as oppressing the poor (34:20-28). God cannot be condemned for being quiet, for evaluating people and making his judgements behind the scenes because he still is in fact administering justice (34:29-30).

L. 34:31-33 – Elihu indicates with a rhetorical question that it would be a rare person indeed who, after suffering, accepted that he had done wrong but who was unaware of what he had done. But at least that person would be accepting that the suffering was due to his wrong rather than charging God with injustice. He then asks Job if he thinks God should treat him as he (Job) wishes despite his rejection of conviction, his refusal to acknowledge in principle his wrongdoing. That is not a decision Elihu can make for him, but he invites Job to confess his error.

M. 34:34-37 – Elihu asserts that understanding and wise people will agree that Job is speaking in ignorance and without insight. Such people long for Job to be thoroughly examined so his flawed arguments will be exposed. For he answers like wicked men in that he adds to the sin that brought on his suffering by his rebellious response to that suffering. He expresses anger and contempt toward (claps his hands – Job 27:23; Lam. 2:15; Ezek. 6:11) the wise who are trying to help him and he multiplies his accusations against God.

N. 35:1-8 – Do you think it is just for you to judge God to be unjust, which you did in declaring you are in the right rather than God? For you said there is no advantage in refraining from sin, which is another way of saying God does not give to people what they deserve and therefore is unjust (35:1-3). Elihu replies by arguing that human sin and righteousness do not harm or benefit God; they only affect other humans that way (35:4-8). The point seems to be that God is not biased in his judgment of situations or cases by people's *prior* conduct. He is not like a human judge who would favor the one who had previously benefited him (bribe) and cheat the one who had previously harmed him. His impartiality in judging a situation or case is not compromised by prior action of the parties. He calls each case and situation as it is, the very opposite of an unjust judge.

O. 35:9-16 – Elihu says that the oppressed cry out for help but not to God. And when, in their pride they do not seek him, he ignores their cries (35:9-12). Given that God pays no attention to an empty cry, how much less attention will he pay to Job when he complains that he does not see him, that he is waiting on his appearance for the case that has been laid before him (35:13-14). According to Elihu, because Job is convinced that God's anger does not punish transgression, he has been emboldened to say foolish things (35:15-16).

P. 36:1-4 – Elihu urges the listeners to bear with him because he is God's spokesman. He gets his knowledge from God (from afar), and his words are true. Indeed, he is before them as one perfect in knowledge.

Q. 36:5-15 – He announces that God is great and does not despise great strength of heart, meaning that, contrary to what some may be thinking, God is not displeased with the boldness of

his words (36:5). He then declares that God takes care of the innocent and punishes the wicked (36:6-7). He says that those suffering are being disciplined by God. If they repent, they will be restored by God, but if they refuse, they will perish (36:8-12). The latter, the group in which Elihu includes Job, are godless and simply will not turn despite the discipline, and as a result they die young and in humiliating circumstances (36:13-14). He sums up the idea of disciplinary suffering in 36:15: God uses suffering to save sinners from their sin and set them on the right path. God can and does do that, but it is a mistake to cram all suffering into that category (Longman, 402).

R. 36:16-21 – If Job were willing, God would have brought him to a place of blessing through the suffering inflicted upon him, but because he was not, he continues to suffer the judgment of the wicked (36:16-17). He warns Job not to let anger lead him to scoff at God's discipline and not to let the seemingly great cost (ransom) of confession and repentance after steadfastly maintaining his innocence prevent him from doing so (36:18). Neither his cry nor strength will substitute to keep him from distress (36:19). He warns Job not to long for the cover of darkness in which his presumed sin can go unnoticed and not to turn even more toward evil, which his refusal to repent shows he values more than the suffering it brings (36:20-21).

S. 36:22-33 – Elihu says that God has no equal in power, is sovereign, and is above any challenge to his conduct, implying that Job has no business charging him with wrongdoing. He also says that God has no equal in teaching ability, implying that responsibility for Job's failure to learn the lesson from God's discipline lies with Job (36:22-23). He then extols God's greatness, focusing in vv. 27-33 on his control of storms, the point being that he is not to be treated as Job is doing.

T. 37:1-13 – Elihu continues with his depiction of God's awesome power as manifested in storms, including snowstorms. God marks his great "storm work" as his (seals it) by the hand of man in that man ceases agricultural work in response to it (37:7) (NET: He causes everyone to stop working, so that all people may know his work.) And the wild animals retreat into their lairs (37:8). He does it with a purpose, just as he does with the "storms" of suffering (37:13).

U. 37:14-20 – Elihu calls Job to ponder the awesome works of God and to recognize the vast superiority of God's knowledge and ability. Verse 19 is a sarcastic stab at Job's presumption in thinking he can put God in the wrong. Of course, Job recognizes God's power (e.g., 9:4-10), but he believes that great power is being exercised unjustly in his case and fears it will prevent him from getting a fair shake. Elihu's questions anticipate God's questions in the following chapters, but Elihu is implying that Job's ignorance of God's ways somehow translates into accepting that God is disciplining him for sin, which Job knows is not the case. When God himself raises such questions, there is not only the transforming effect of a theophany, but also God knows the truth and thus his questions have a different import. God's surpassing greatness means trusting his character despite the dissonance caused by the seemingly inconsistent *facts* of his great suffering and his righteousness.

V. 37:21-24 – Elihu closes his long address by indicating God is too splendid and glorious to be found, just like one cannot look at the sun in the sky on a clear day. So it is no surprise Job cannot have a "face to face" (37:21-23a). And contrary to Job's claim, God is just

and righteous – end of story (37:23b). Indeed, that is why wise people fear him, the implication being that Job is not wise because, based on his irreverence toward God, he does not fear him.

When Elihu finishes speaking, no one responds to him, and he is not heard from again. That probably indicates he did not have anything new to add in terms of the argument. Indeed, he mainly repeats points that the three friends had already made, though he put a greater emphasis on the disciplinary aspect of suffering. Elihu, like the friends, wants Job to repent of sins that led to his suffering, but Job has already rejected that argument as made by the friends.

But if Elihu makes no new argument, it raises the question of the purpose of his speech in the book. As Longman suggests, the difference is not in the novelty of his argument against Job but the *ground* from which he argues. Longman states (p. 367-368): "Right at the start, he distances himself from the friends, who have based their wisdom on the tradition of the fathers and the experiences of old age. Elihu, for his part, claims a spiritual wisdom. Thus he represents yet another human pretension to wisdom, a false kind of spirituality that leads to error rather than insight." He states elsewhere (p. 410):

Thus, the claim of spiritual inspiration can be dangerous, and Elihu illustrates that danger. After all, we know from the continuation of the plot in the book of Job that Elihu misrepresents himself. He does not speak as God's mouthpiece. He simply repeats the tired retribution theology of the three friends. He accuses Job of being a sinner, who is suffering because of his sin, and as a result Job needs to repent.

As I pointed out . . . the purpose of Elihu's presence in the book is almost certainly to undermine a school of thought (or at least a way of thinking) that was contemporary with the time when the book of Job was written. But such a viewpoint is not restricted to the past. Plenty of people still adorn their own thoughts with the assertion that God is speaking through them or the broader claim that they can name God's purposes in the events of the day. Elihu looked at Job's suffering and claimed spiritual inspiration to accuse him of sin.

## VII. Yahweh Speaks (ch. 38-41)

Job's friends (and Elihu) insisted that the solution to Job's suffering was his repentance. If he would turn from whatever sin(s) for which he was being punished or disciplined, God would restore him. Job, on the other hand, believed the solution to his suffering was in confronting God and establishing that he was being unjustly treated. In chapter 38, Job gets an audience with God, but it is God who confronts him rather than the other way around.

A. 38:1-3 – Yahweh answers Job from a whirlwind, meaning a strong storm, which is a threatening manifestation that suggests his anger or displeasure with Job. That disposition is made clear by his rhetorical question, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" He is saying Job's ignorant words confuse the issue and thus darken correct advice in the sense of obscuring it, making it difficult to perceive. God then announces his intention to demonstrate Job's ignorance and to show Job who is God and who is creature, telling him to brace himself to answer his questions.

B. 38:4-7 – God asks Job questions about creation that neither Job nor any human could answer. No human was present at that time.

C. 38:8-11 – God continues speaking of creation, this time alluding to the events of Gen. 1:9-10 where he created the sea by gathering together into the place he determined the water that was covering the land. (As bars and doors represent the sea's containment, clouds and thick darkness represent the inscrutability with which God endowed the sea at creation.) That was his work, not man's.

D. 38:12-15 – These rhetorical questions assert that God and not man knows and manages the creation. He alone brings the dawn that causes evildoers (who love darkness) to retreat and reveals the features and colors of the earth. With dawn, the "light" of the wicked, *their* light, meaning the darkness in which they operate, is withheld from them and their upraised arm, symbolizing the violence they inflict, is broken in that they are denied the cover of darkness.

E. 38:16-17 – God exposes Job's ignorance of the mysteries of the oceans and the realm of the dead. This is beyond what any human knows.

F. 38:18-21 – God exposes Job's ignorance of the size of the earth and where night and day reside when they are not being experienced. This relates to what in Job's day were celestial or astronomical mysteries. Because Job had grown presumptuous in his attitude toward God, he taunts Job by telling him he must know the answers because his days go back to creation.

G. 38:22-30 – God now highlights Job's ignorance of meteorological phenomena. Job is clueless about the bringing of rain, snow, hail, storms, lightning, wind, dew, frost, and ice. We have learned much about these things in our exploration of God's creation, but there is still plenty we do not know.

H. 38:31-38 – God continues with questions that reveal Job's place in the universe, that he is a creature and not God. The heavens with their constellations were created by God and operate as he determined. Job can do nothing regarding them. And God alone controls and directs storms and rains. He also is the one who imbued the ibis and rooster (translation is uncertain; this is rendering of NAB, NJB, NIV, and a number of commentators) with whatever behavior it was that caused them to be associated with wisdom in the ancient world.

I. 38:39-41 – Only God can provide food for the lion and raven and for their young. He is the one who in cursing creation after the Fall established a sustainable ecosystem in a world that now includes predation. This is way above mankind's paygrade.

J. 39:1-4 – God, not Job, knows the rhythms and details of the lives of inaccessible mountain goats.

K. 39:5-8 – Only he knows how the wild donkey (onager) came to dwell where it does.

L. 39:9-12 – God continues pounding home that Job is not in charge or control of the created order. Job cannot control such a powerful beast as the wild ox to have it serve him. Only God can do that.

M. 39:13-18 – Unlike the behaviors of the ibis and rooster (if that's the correct rendering) that are considered wise, God has imbued the ostrich with behavior regarding her eggs and young that seems foolish. But on the other hand, he has endowed her with great speed. The point is that God gives certain traits to the various animals as he determines. No human does such a thing.

N. 39:19-25 – Job did not give the warhorse its strength, appearance, and abilities. Only God did that.

O. 39:26-30 – It is not by Job's understanding and design that the eagle has the characteristics and behaviors that it has. That is God's work.

P. 40:1-2 – God concludes his first speech to Job with the rhetorical question, "Shall a faultfinder (i.e., Job) contend with the Almighty?" Longman comments (p. 438-439):

God sounds offended that Job would think to instruct him, and no wonder, considering who God is (as demonstrated throughout the first speech) and who Job is (a mere creature). God is the repository of wisdom and distributes wisdom to whom he sees fit. On what grounds does Job instruct him? Worse yet, Job "contends" with God. The verb *rib* comes from the realm of law. Job is making charges against God. . . . How dare a human contend with Shaddai? Yet God gives him the opportunity to defend himself. Job has reproved, that is, reprimanded God, so let Job now defend himself. As we will see, Job knows better than to take up this challenge.

Q. 40:3-5 – Job's confrontation with God isn't turning out as Job envisioned. He has been put in his place and can only confess that he is small before God and unable to say anything in his defense. He will not add to his earlier statements, which he presumably now regrets making.

R. 40:6-14

1. God unleashes another torrent of questions designed further to drive home Job's place in the universe. Though Job was rendered silent by the first round of questions – he thought better of accusing God of wrong – he did not express regret or repentance for having previously done so. The fact God continues to speak from the storm symbolizes his continuing displeasure.

2. God tells Job to brace for more questions, the first two of which in v. 8 are very significant because they reveal or confirm the import of some of Job's words in his earlier speeches. He accuses Job of illegitimately undermining his justice by asking if Job will discredit his justice (or will put him in the wrong). He asks if Job will sacrifice God's reputation by charging him with wrong to save his own reputation as a righteous man.

3. Rather than tell Job his righteous reason for allowing him to suffer, God emphasizes that he and not Job is powerful, majestic, splendid, and glorious by challenging Job to adorn himself with those traits, to show them. He then challenges Job to bring judgment on the arrogant and wicked. If Job cannot do these things, which of course he cannot, then he has no business crossing swords with God.

#### S. 40:15-24

1. God directs Job's attention to Behemoth, a "super beast" that he created, as he created Job. The description is of a huge, river-dwelling herbivore that is too powerful to be captured or controlled by mankind.

2. He is called "first of the works of God" presumably in the sense he was the largest and grandest of such creatures made by God. Most understand Behemoth to be a hippopotamus (see Clines), but the reference to its tail being in some way like a cedar tree seems to fit better with a kind of dinosaur. Of course, one who accepts the story of earth history as told by the scientific establishment will reject that possibility – indeed, Longman labels it "preposterous" – because dinosaurs were extinct for tens of millions of years before humans came on the scene and thus ancient cultures were unaware of their existence. But I am convinced the story preached by the scientific establishment contradicts what God has revealed in Scripture.

#### T. 41:1-34

1. The Lord's second speech ends with reference to another of his amazing creatures, Leviathan, and questions designed to establish that God alone controls such a tremendous beast. Leviathan is a huge, powerful, fearsome, and fearless sea creature which, as I noted regarding 3:8, was embellished in pagan mythology into the embodiment of the forces of chaos and destruction that were overcome in creation. As with Behemoth, it cannot be captured or controlled by mankind.

2. Most understand it to be a crocodile (see Clines), but the identified features, even allowing for metaphorical language and some degree of hyperbole, do not fit that creature squarely. I again think it may refer to some extinct creature that was known or remembered in Job's day (see NIDOTTE, 2:780). Perhaps most interesting are the statements in vv. 18-21 that he produces from his mouth or nose flashes of light, flames, sparks of fire, and smoke. This could be metaphorical language expressing the violent discharge of pent-up breath and water that has the appearance of smoke, a vapor cloud, which in certain sunlight also looks like sparks or streams of fire. Or maybe this creature had unique chemical or biological mechanisms that allowed it to spray a fluorescent chemical or a combustible gas that was ignited by a bioelectric spark such as electric eels produce.

### VIII. Job Repents (ch. 42:1-6)

A. Between the agony of his prolonged suffering and his mistaken commitment to retribution theology, Job's vision of God became clouded so that he concluded God was doing wrong, punishing him unjustly. To paraphrase the psalmist, his feet had begun to stumble and his

steps had begun to slip (Ps. 73:2). This mighty theophany, this experience of God's presence, renewed and reaffirmed Job's conviction of God's absolute power and sovereignty. He confesses God can do *all things*, within which he now includes the seemingly impossible task (from Job's theological perspective) of allowing the righteous to suffer as he has.

B. Job refers back to God's accusing question in 38:2 – Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? – and confesses that he did indeed obscure counsel, that is, he made sound advice or instruction difficult to perceive, by speaking in ignorance about things way above his paygrade. His trust in his own wisdom led him to conclude God was in the wrong in his case rather than assume something was going on that he simply could not understand.

C. Job refers back to God's command to listen up and prepare to answer God's questions, which questions impressed upon Job God's displeasure with his charge of injustice. Whereas he had previously been operating only on hearsay about God, which is how he picked up his absolutist retribution theology, this personal encounter led him to realize something else must be going on. That encounter forced on Job the possibility that the dichotomy under which he and his friends operated, *either* Job was a sinner *or* God was unjust, was a false one, even if he could not see the justification for his suffering.

D. That is why Job says he despises himself (or the things he said) and repents in dust and ashes, referring to symbols of mourning (in ashes with dust sprinkled on his head). He had been pulled by his suffering and mistaken theology to accuse Almighty God. But he never "cursed" God in the sense of rejecting him. He struggled in a vortex to make sense of God and was handicapped in so doing by an overly simplistic theology.

E. The fact Job repented does not mean his friends had been right all along, that the solution to his troubles was repentance. What he repented of was not some hidden sin that was the cause of his suffering, as alleged by his friends. There was no such sin; Job was a paragon of righteousness. Rather, he repented of the things he said against God during the course of his prolonged suffering. Longman comments (p. 453):

Thus, Job's speeches are not an example of the proper attitude toward God in the midst of suffering. Granted, some elements are highly commendable. For instance, he never gives up on God or curses God. He does not capitulate to the weak arguments of his friends and repent of sins he never committed. Nevertheless, God is not fully affirming Job's approach to him by a long stretch.

F. Longman says of Job's journey (p. 456):

At the end of the prologue, Job had shown himself obedient in spite of his suffering (1:22; 2:10). But as time went on and the reader moved into the poetic dialogue, Job certainly questioned whether obedience was worth it. Nonetheless, Job never turned disobedient in spite of his suffering. He questioned, he doubted, he demanded an audience with God, but he never abandoned God. Still, until the divine speeches begin, one wonders how long Job will hold on to his desire for a relationship with God.

The ultimate answer to these questions comes in Job's final response, when he repents and stands silent before God, in whose presence he finds himself, even without an answer to his burning question about his suffering. Though the term "fear" is not used in Job's speech, fearing God is precisely what strikes him silent and submissive before God. He preserves his integrity until the bitter end and – this is important – before he has his prosperity restored. Job is not told by God that he will restore Job; nonetheless, Job fears God. In this, Job demonstrates to all (the accuser seems long gone) that he will worship God in spite of an absence of prosperity. Indeed, he will worship God even in the midst of his suffering.

## IX. Prose Epilogue – Job's Restoration (ch. 42:7-17)

### A. 42:7-9

1. In 42:7 God is angry with Job's three friends because they did not speak of him what is right, *unlike his servant Job* (see also v. 8). Obviously, God is not approving everything Job said about him, as he just rebuked Job for wrongly accusing him of injustice during his dispute with his friends. Rather, he is saying Job spoke of him what is right in that Job, by steadfastly maintaining his own righteousness, in effect denied his friends' false claim that God governs the world according to a strict or absolutist retributive justice, that he brings suffering on all the unrighteous and only on the unrighteous and pours out blessings on all the righteous and only on the righteous. Job holds himself out as proof that God does not operate that way.

2. Of course, Job thought that made God unjust because he accepted, with his friends, that God *should* operate that way, but he nevertheless rejected implicitly the assertion that God does in fact operate that way. He also spoke of God what is right in his confession that he obscured counsel by speaking in ignorance about things that were "out of his league" (42:1-6). That carries an acknowledgement that God knows best and is to be trusted in his governance of creation even when we do not comprehend his working.

3. So it is less offensive to God for a righteous sufferer to accuse him falsely of injustice than for one who is not suffering to accuse him falsely of governing the world by an absolutist retributive justice and consequently to accuse the righteous sufferer of wickedness.

a. The former is honestly assessing the facts (innocence and suffering) and trying to make sense of them, albeit from within a mistaken theological understanding (retribution theology); the latter is closing his mind to the facts (innocence), not being an honest seeker (e.g., rejecting out of hand Job's credible protestations of innocence), to force the situation to conform to a mistaken theological understanding.

b. The former allows his theology to be challenged by facts but in pain reaches a wrong conclusion, whereas the latter in his hubris will not consider any challenge to his theology. The one acting in extremis speaks falsely about God but maintains his integrity and thus encourages others to do the same. The one acting from calm reflection burdens the sufferer with a lie and pulls him toward a dishonest assessment of his life.

4. God instructs the three friends to take bulls and rams to Job for him to offer them as sacrifices on their behalf. Job is to intercede on their behalf in a priest-like role, which indicates this is before the time of the Mosaic priesthood. God says he will accept Job's prayer for them and not deal with them in accordance with the foolish thing they said about him. They did as instructed, and God accepted Job's prayer as promised.

B. 42:10-11 – Job had learned to submit himself to God's sovereign power and wisdom beyond his limited understanding without any promise that he would be restored. But when Job prayed for his three friends, those who had accused and burdened him, God in his sovereignty and wisdom chose to restore what Job had lost and to bless him with twice the material prosperity he had before. This begins with his embrace by his family and acquaintances, who had turned from him in his distress (6:14-23; 19:13-22).

C. 42:12-17 – Job is given wealth, a new family of seven sons and three daughters, each of whom is named, and a long life of 140 additional years. Longman notes (p. 460):

But now God in his wisdom and sovereignty chooses to restore Job to his previous good life and even more. Such a restoration is a narrative way of showing that Job had done the right thing. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that this is the way God will act with everyone. If we were to take this as a pattern by which God behaves, we would be as guilty of putting God in a box as the human characters of this book were throughout.

### Some Lessons

1. God does not govern the world according to an absolutist retributive justice. That is, he does not in this life bring suffering on *all* the unrighteous and *only* on the unrighteous and pour out blessings on *all* the righteous and *only* on the righteous. He makes exceptions according to his good purposes.
2. God's good purposes in making exceptions to retributive justice, in allowing the righteous sometimes to suffer and the wicked sometimes to prosper, cannot be discovered by human insight. Human wisdom is inadequate to the task, as illustrated in the prolonged debate where five different wisdom teachers grappled with Job's suffering and essentially kept spinning their wheels, reploughing the same ground and never arriving at the truth. So unless God reveals his reason for allowing undeserved or disproportionate suffering, we will not know it.
3. Those who cannot accept this boundary to human wisdom sometimes conclude from their inability to perceive a good purpose in suffering that no such purpose exists. From this, they claim that God does not exist or that he is evil, one who allows a morally unjustifiable suffering that he could prevent. Job teaches us that is a mistake.
4. There are, of course, rare instances in which God reveals his reason for allowing what would otherwise appear to be gratuitous suffering. As readers, we are privy to the reason for Job's suffering, but those involved in it are not. Jesus reveals in Jn. 9:3 that the person who was born

blind was born that way that Jesus might display in him the works of God by healing him. And, of course, there is the Lord's horrific suffering on Golgotha. God lifts the veil in that instance to show us a case of his bringing ultimate blessing out of savage cruelty. He did something through the evil he allowed to be perpetrated on his Son that we never would have imagined if he had not told us. But generally, we remain in the dark and must trust the character of God beyond what we can figure out.

5. You think of an infant whose parents must perform open heart surgery on him to keep him alive. That baby does not know and is incapable of understanding the things that justify and make right and loving the pain and suffering to which his parents are subjecting him. The message of Job is that God knows things we do not know and are incapable of knowing and that if we knew those things we would understand how the suffering we see is justified and right and loving.

6. Whatever comes your way, cling to God Almighty. Let no suffering drive you to curse God, to walk away from him. You will be eternally grateful that you trusted him beyond what you could understand. Express to God your frustration, doubts, and fears, but do so without concluding that he is in the wrong. Trust that it is your limitation and ignorance that is making it look that way to you and that on "that day" it will all be made clear.