

PERPLEXING HUMAN SUFFERING AND INSCRUTABLE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF JOB

SUBMISSION TO GOD'S INSCRUTABLE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY FORTIFIES PERSEVERANCE AND VINDICATES GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE MIDST OF PERPLEXING HUMAN SUFFERING

Paul Apple (June 2022)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Job 23:10 *"But He knows the way I take;
When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

GENERAL COMMENTS:

David Malick: Message Statement:

The reasons for suffering in a person's life are not necessarily related to human explanations of personal unrighteousness, but are within the scope of God's good and powerful providence resulting in the defeat of evil and glory to himself.

David Thompson: Message of the Book --

God is completely sovereign over everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen to His people during their lives and in view of this, if God's people purpose to remain faithful to Him in worship and stay committed honoring Him through whatever He permits, they will eventually receive God's full blessings.

David Platte: The issue of suffering is used to demonstrate the authority of God in His universe. Does God have the right to control events according to His will, and should we trust Him to do right even when it does not make sense to us?

Cyril Barber: A careful consideration of the book of Job reveals a host of unexpected riches. These include insights into God's sovereignty, and His goodness and justice; Satan is shown to be the adversary of God and the accuser of His people (cf. **Zechariah 3:1; Revelation 12:9-10**); and Job illustrates for us the appropriate response of a sufferer to his suffering.

Francis Andersen: Men seek an explanation of suffering in cause and effect. They look backwards for a connection between prior sin and present suffering. The Bible looks forward in hope and seeks explanations not so much in origins as in goals. [Scripture teaches us that] the purpose of suffering is seen, not in its cause, but in its result.

David Atkinson: God sometimes allows or, dare we say, ordains that we walk in the valley of the shadow, perhaps because it may be that there is no other way of discovering the power of his comforting rod and staff. Or perhaps it is because of some inscrutable providence of his own in which – in all his love and grace, and not in the slightest manipulatively – he calls on us to be his servants through our pains and our frailties within wider purposes in heaven than we on earth can discern. . .

The book of Job brings us to the edge. It confronts us with failure, and with suffering for which there is no explanation. It faces us with the inadequacy of ministry; with the inappropriateness of some forms of preaching; with a God who seems silent, callous, unfair and remote. We are forced to rethink our prejudices; rethink our theology; rethink the meaning of pastoral care in the face of injustice and suffering; rethink what we say about God. And though at the end of the day, the book brings us back to the all-sufficiency of divine grace, and stands out amongst the Wisdom literature in the Bible as a plea to see things from a divine and not a human perspective, there is a long, painful and arduous path to climb before we hear the Lord speaking, as he does at the end of the book, from the whirlwind.

Mark Copeland: It is common to suggest that the purpose of the book is to answer the age-old question, “**Why does God allow the righteous to suffer?**” That is certainly the question Job raises, but it is worthy to note that he himself never receives a direct answer. Nor is one given by the author, other than to answer Satan’s challenge, “*Does Job fear God for nothing?*” We are privileged to know of the challenge of Satan, and that God allows Job to suffer in answer to that challenge, but Job is never told of this. Therefore, I suggest that the purpose of the book is: To answer the question, “**How should the righteous suffer?**” While Job’s questions and complaints often come close to charging God with wrong, he never crosses the line and humbly submits to God when told that the answers to his questions are beyond his ability to understand. Thus the book shows us **how the righteous should bear up under suffering** (“*You have heard of the perseverance of Job*” - **Ja 5:11**).

J. Sidlow Baxter: Blessing through Suffering

In a general sense the design of this book is “to justify the ways of God to man,” by correcting certain misconceptions which arise from men’s imperfect knowledge: but the **special** object is to show that there is a benevolent Divine purpose running through the sufferings of the godly, and that life’s bitterest enigmas are reconcilable with this benevolent Divine purpose, did we but know all the facts. . .

Between the prologue, which shows how Job’s trial **originated** in the counsels of heaven, and the epilogue, which shows how Job’s trial **eventuated** in enrichment and blessing, we have a group of patriarchal wiseacres theorizing and dogmatizing from incomplete premises and deficient data. . . We are meant to see that there was an explanation, even though Job and his friends did not know it, so that when baffling affliction comes to ourselves we may believe that the same holds good in our own case – that there is, indeed, a purpose for it in the counsels of heaven, and a foreknown outcome of blessing. . .

Why do the godly suffer? . . . The purpose of the book is to show that the final solution is as yet withheld, and that an interim solution is provided, namely, that suffering fulfils a Divine purpose and exercises a gracious ministry in the godly. . . Such suffering, as we learn from this Book of Job, is not judicial, but remedial; not punitive, but corrective; not retributive, but disciplinary; not a penalty, but a ministry. This is the interim solution. The final solution will be given in that promised day when, instead of seeing through a glass darkly, we shall see “*face to face*” and shall “*know even as we are known.*”

S. Barabas: The author of the Book of Job purposes to show how the theological position of Job’s friends represents a shallow and only partial observation of life: that is, that man’s suffering is always proportionate to his sins. There is no studied attempt to justify God with regard to the innocent suffering, but the author does show God has higher purposes, and far from abandoning the sufferer communicates with him at the proper time. A subsidiary purpose is to show that though men are often sinful, weak and ignorant, they can, like Job, be relatively pure and upright even when in the midst of emotional turmoil and spiritual testing.

Roy Zuck: The Book of Job also teaches that to ask why, as Job did (**3:11-12, 16, 20**), is not wrong. But to demand that God explain ones’ adversities is inappropriate for it places man above God and challenges God’s sovereignty.

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

We might conclude then that the basis of God's dealings with mankind is His sovereignty. However, that answer goes too far back. God's sovereignty really has nothing to do with how He rules. The attribute of sovereignty only sets forth God's position as Supreme Ruler.

How does God rule sovereignly? If it is not on the basis of retribution, on what basis is it? Evidence in the Book of Job points to **God's grace** as the basis of His dealings with people. Instead of always dealing with people in retribution, God always deals with us in grace in this life. What does this mean? This means that instead of responding to our good actions with blessing, or our bad actions with cursing, consistently, **God initiates favor toward us without our deserving it.**

Derek Kidner: To avoid making shipwreck, it is necessary to obtain keys in order to unlock the mysteries of the book of Job. One key is provided for us in the book of James: “*You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy*” (**James 5:11**). The book of Job swivels on two hinges: Job as a man of enduring, persevering godliness under the most acute sufferings; and God as a sovereign, covenantally faithful Father who will not abandon his own children.

E.S.P. Heavener: We are entitled to find here a suggestion of the truth that now we can only “*see in a mirror dimly*”. Job and the others were trying to fit together the pieces of a puzzle without having all the pieces within their grasp. Consequently the book of Job is an eloquent commentary on the inadequacy of the human mind to reduce the complexity of the problem of suffering to some consistent pattern. . .

But while the author would certainly have recommended humility in any contemplation of the fact of suffering, he would not have advocated despair. He believes in a God who has the answer to human need. The appearance of men to counsel Job leads to controversy, disillusionment and despair; the appearance of God leads to submission, faith and courage. The word of man is unable to penetrate the darkness of Job’s mind; the Word of God brings abiding light. The God of the theophany does not answer any of the burning questions that are debated so hotly in the course of the book; but He answers the need of Job’s heart. He does not explain any phase of the battle; but He makes Job more than conqueror in it.

TITLE:

John MacArthur: As with other books of the Bible, Job bears the name of the narrative’s primary character. This name might have been derived from the Hebrew word for “*persecution*,” thus meaning “*persecuted one*,” or from an Arabic word meaning “*repent*,” thus bearing the name “*repentant one*.” The author recounts an era in the life of Job, in which he was tested and the

character of God was revealed. New Testament writers directly quote Job two times (**Rom. 11:35; 1 Cor. 3:19**), plus **Ezekiel 14:14, 20** and **James 5:11** show Job was a real person.

Bob Utley: The book is named after its chief character. Job (**BDB 33, KB 36**) is a very common name in the ANE. Its meaning has been interpreted as

1. “*where is Father*” (northwestern Semitic name, **W. F. Albright**)
2. “*an enemy*” (Hebrew root, cf. **Job 13:24; 33:10**)
3. “*one who repents*” (Arabic root, cf. **Job 42:6**)

AUTHOR AND CANONICITY:

Chuck Swindoll: The author of the book of Job is unknown. Several suggestions have been put forth as plausible authors: Job himself, who could have best recalled his own words; Elihu, the fourth friend who spoke toward the end of the story; various biblical writers and leaders; or many editors who compiled the material over the years. While there is no definitive answer, it was most likely an eyewitness who recorded the detailed and lengthy conversations found in the book. In Old Testament times, authors sometimes referred to themselves in the third person, so Job’s authorship is a strong possibility.

E.S.P. Heavener: The author is unknown. Various suggestions have been made: Job, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Baruch the friend of Jeremiah, etc. None can be established. All that can be said with certainty is that he was a loyal Jew who refused, however, to be shackled by every detail of the popular creed, in particular his remorseless bracketing of suffering and sin.

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

John Hartley: The author was a highly educated person and a devout servant of Yahweh; he may be numbered among the great wise men of ancient Israel.

John MacArthur: The book does not name its author. Job is an unlikely candidate because the book’s message rests on Job’s ignorance of the events that occurred in heaven as they related to his ordeal. One Talmudic tradition suggests Moses as author since the land of Uz (**1:1**) was adjacent to Midian where Moses lived for 40 years, and he could have obtained a record of the story there. Solomon is also a good possibility due to the similarity of content with parts of the book of Ecclesiastes, as well as the fact that Solomon wrote the other Wisdom books (except Psalms, and he did author **Pss. 72; 127**). Though he lived long after Job, Solomon could have written about events that occurred long before his own time, in much the same manner as Moses was inspired to write about Adam and Eve. Elihu, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra have also been suggested as possible authors, but without support.

Tremper Longman: Eventually the order Job, Psalms, Proverbs won the day in Western Christianity under the influence of Jerome and his Vulgate. This chronological order (Job, David, Solomon) was affirmed by the Council of Trent and is used in all modern Christian translations.

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. It's not that there aren't "many voices" in the book of Job (as **Fisher**'s title states), but these many voices ultimately yield to the **one Voice** that speaks at the end and brings the book to a dramatic resolution. Determining a precise date for the final form of the book is not possible, nor is it important for interpretation.

Robert Alden: Many scholars draw parallels between the Book of Job and certain literary works of the ancient Near East, from Egypt to Mesopotamia. And even though there may have been many parallels and imitations since Job, the book stands alone both in the Bible and in the world of literature.

David Platte: Other Bible references confirm the **historical truth** of the story of Job, showing that he lived and his story was well known: **Ezek. 14:14,20; James 5:11**. He was a real man, his story actually occurred, and he was a faithful servant of God, just as surely were Noah, Daniel, etc. Further, the inspiration of the book is confirmed by the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 3:19**, where he quotes directly from **Job 5:13** saying, "*it is written*." This expression is used repeatedly to refer to inspired Scripture.

Elmer Smick: The authority of the Book of Job is tied to its place in the Hebrew canon that the Jewish community held in common with Jesus and the early church as Scripture. Despite its difficulties theologically and linguistically, its place in the canon was never seriously challenged. The book itself, however, remains one of the greatest exegetical challenges facing the biblical scholar.

LITERARY GENRE:

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

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

Tremper Longman: A broad genre categorization of Job notes that it is composed of both prose (**1:1–2:13; 42:7–17**) and poetry (**3:1–42:6**). The prose framework gives the book a narrative feel throughout; that is, it tells a story that has a plot. Like any plot, it has a beginning, middle, and end. The plot is generated by a conflict that seeks and finally achieves resolution. . . The bulk of the book is poetry. Hebrew poetry has different conventions and triggers different

reading strategies. The conventions include parallelism, imagery, and terse lines. Poetry says a lot using only a few words. Thus, one reading strategy that poetry triggers is to slow down and meditate on the richness of meaning and feeling evoked by the language. The terseness of the language heightens the difficulty of interpretation and leads to a higher level of ambiguity than in prose. This ambiguity must be respected by the interpreter, who should not try to turn the poem into prose. Ancient Hebrew poets also employed a number of more occasional literary devices that lend interest to their lines but are virtually impossible to reproduce in English translation (wordplays, sound-plays, etc.); some of these will be pointed out in the commentary.[40]

In sum, Job is a poetical book framed by a prose narrative.

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

Mark Copeland: The Book of Job has long been praised as a masterpiece of literature. Consider these quotes:

“Tomorrow, if all literature was to be destroyed and it was left to me to retain one work only, I should save Job.” (**Victor Hugo**)

“...the greatest poem, whether of ancient or modern literature.” (**Tennyson**)

“The Book of Job taken as a mere work of literary genius, is one of the most wonderful productions of any age or of any language.” (**Daniel Webster**)

Roy Zuck: The literary form of the Book of Job is probably a composite of a lawsuit, a controversy dialogue or wisdom disputation, and a lament.

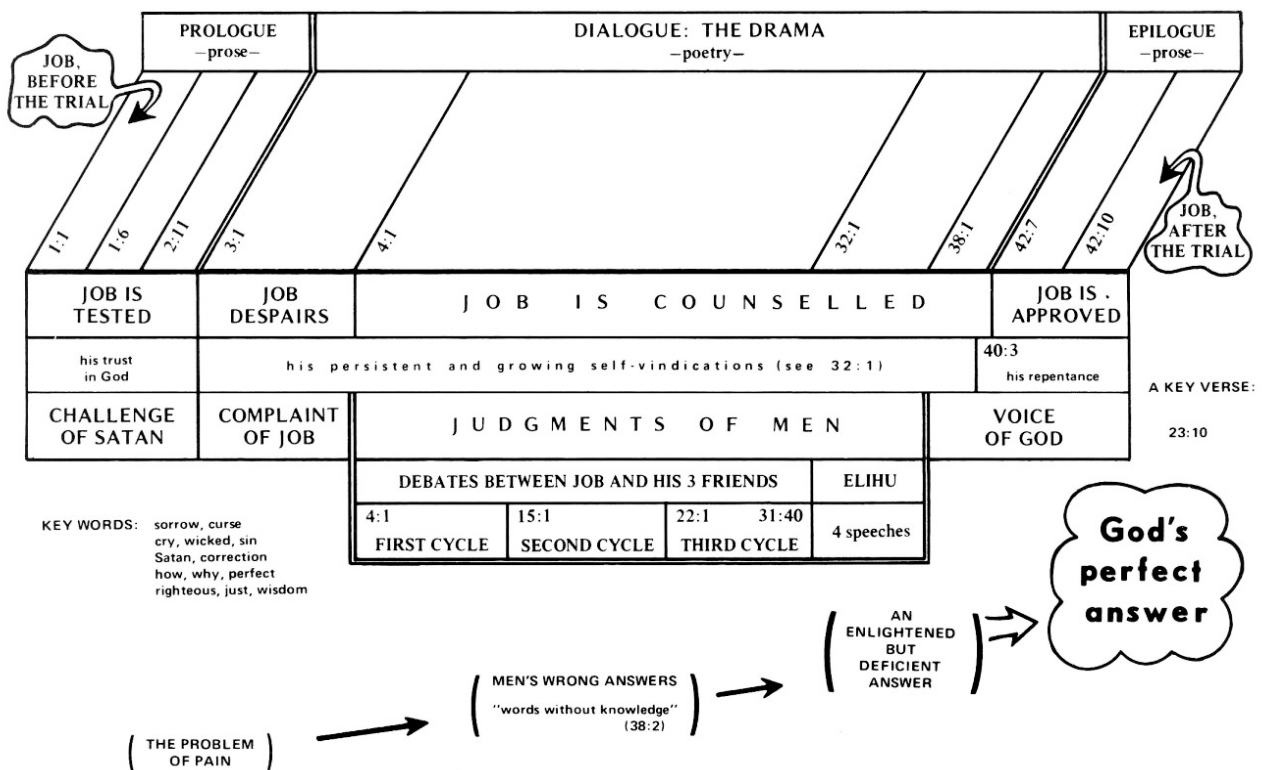
HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Chuck Swindoll: Though the text does not directly identify its setting, internal clues indicate that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs, approximately 2100 to 1900 BC. According to **Job 42:16**, Job lived an additional 140 years after his tragedies occurred, perhaps to around 210 years total. His long lifespan generally corresponds to that of Terah (Abraham’s father), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Also, Job’s wealth was measured in livestock (**Job 1:3; 42:12**), as was Abraham’s (**Genesis 12:16**). Like the patriarchs, Job used God’s unique title “*El Shaddai*” (God Almighty). The book of Job does not mention the Mosaic Law; indeed, Job’s daughters were equal heirs with his sons, and Job himself, though not a priest, offered sacrifices—things not possible under the Law (**Leviticus 4:10; Numbers 27:8**). Though we cannot be certain, Job may have lived during the time of Jacob or shortly thereafter.

John MacArthur: It is likely that the book of Job was written much later than the events depicted in its pages. Job had a lifespan of nearly 200 years (see **42:16**), which fits the patriarchal period (e.g., Abraham lived 175 years according to **Genesis 25:7**). Furthermore, the social unit was structured around the patriarchal family, the Chaldeans (who murdered Job's servants) were still nomadic and not yet city dwellers (see **1:17**), Job's wealth was measured in livestock rather than gold and silver (see **1:3**; **42:12**), Job conducted priestly functions within his family (see **1:4-5**), and the text is silent on matters such as the covenant of Abraham, Israel, the Exodus, and the Law of Moses. However, Job appears to know about Adam (see **31:33**) and the flood (see **12:15**). These features appear to place the events chronologically at a time after the Tower of Babel (see **Genesis 11:1-9**) but before or contemporaneous with Abraham (see **Genesis 11:27**).

STRUCTURE:

Jensen's Survey of the New Testament Chart on Job



Elmer Smick: Chiasm in the structure of Job:

A Prologue **chs. 1—2**

B Job's opening lament **ch. 3**

C Dialogue disputes (3 cycles) **chs. 4—14; 15—21; 22—27**

D Interlude on wisdom ch. 28

C' Monologues (3 cycles) **chs. 29—31 (Job); 32—37 (Elihu); 38—41 (God)**

B' Job's closing contribution **chs. 40:3-5; 42:1-6**

A' Epilogue **ch. 42:7-17**

Chuck Swindoll:

JOB

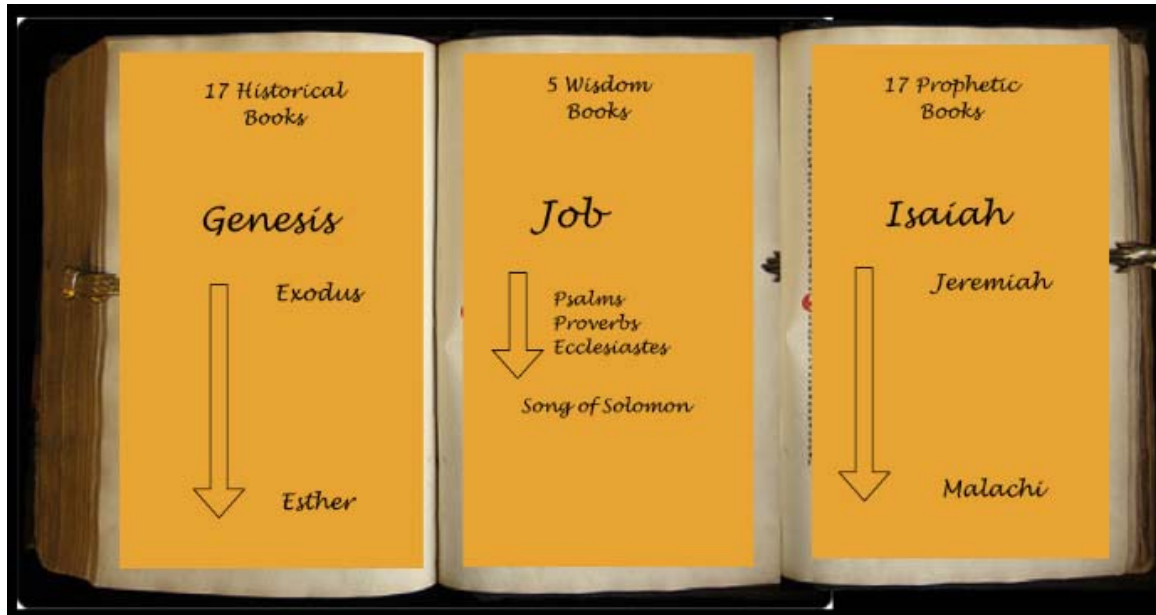
	<div>Introduction to the Suffering</div> <div>Scene 1 Job's purity and prosperity</div> <div>Scene 2 Satan's proposition and Yahweh's permission</div> <div>Scene 3 Satan's persecution and Job's patience</div> <div>Scene 4 Satan's persistence and Yahweh's permission</div> <div>Scene 5 Poverty and plagues</div> <div>CHAPTERS 1–2</div>	<div>Discussion of the Suffering</div> <div>Words of Job (Eyes on Self)</div> <div>Curses birth</div> <div>Curses life</div> <div>CHAPTER 3</div> <div>Words of Three Friends (Eyes on Humanity)</div> <div>Eliphaz</div> <div>Job</div> <div>Zophar Bildad</div> <div>CHAPTERS 4–14</div> <div>Eliphaz</div> <div>Job</div> <div>Zophar Bildad</div> <div>CHAPTERS 15–21</div> <div>Eliphaz</div> <div>Job</div> <div>Bildad</div> <div>Job's monologue</div> <div>CHAPTERS 22–31</div>	<div>Correction in the Suffering</div> <div>Words of Elihu (Eyes on Yahweh)</div> <div>To Job</div> <div>To three friends</div> <div>To Job</div> <div>CHAPTERS 32–37</div> <div>Words of Yahweh (Emphasis on Sovereignty)</div> <div>CHAPTERS 38–41</div>	<div>Submission under the Suffering</div> <div>Job's admission</div> <div>Job's confession</div> <div>CHAPTER 42:1–6</div>	<div>Restoration from the Suffering</div> <div>Yahweh's anger with the three friends</div> <div>Yahweh's blessing on Job</div> <div>CHAPTER 42:7–17</div>			
Key Sections	Historical	Theological / Philosophical			Logical	Revelational	Confessional	Historical
Key People	Job, Yahweh, and Satan	Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar			Elihu	Yahweh	Job	Yahweh, Job, and the three friends
Key Sayings	"Have you considered My servant Job?" (1:8)	" . . . then Job . . . Eliphaz . . . Bildad . . . Zophar answered"			God does "great things which we cannot comprehend" (37:5).	"Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine." (41:11)	Therefore I retract, / And I repent in dust and ashes. (42:6)	The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. (42:12)
Theme	God's sovereignty and humanity's struggle in the midst of suffering							
Key Verse	42:2							
Christ in Job	Job's cry for a mediator (9:33; 33:23–24) and his faith in a Redeemer (19:25–27) foreshadow the intercessory work of Christ.							

Bruce Hurt:

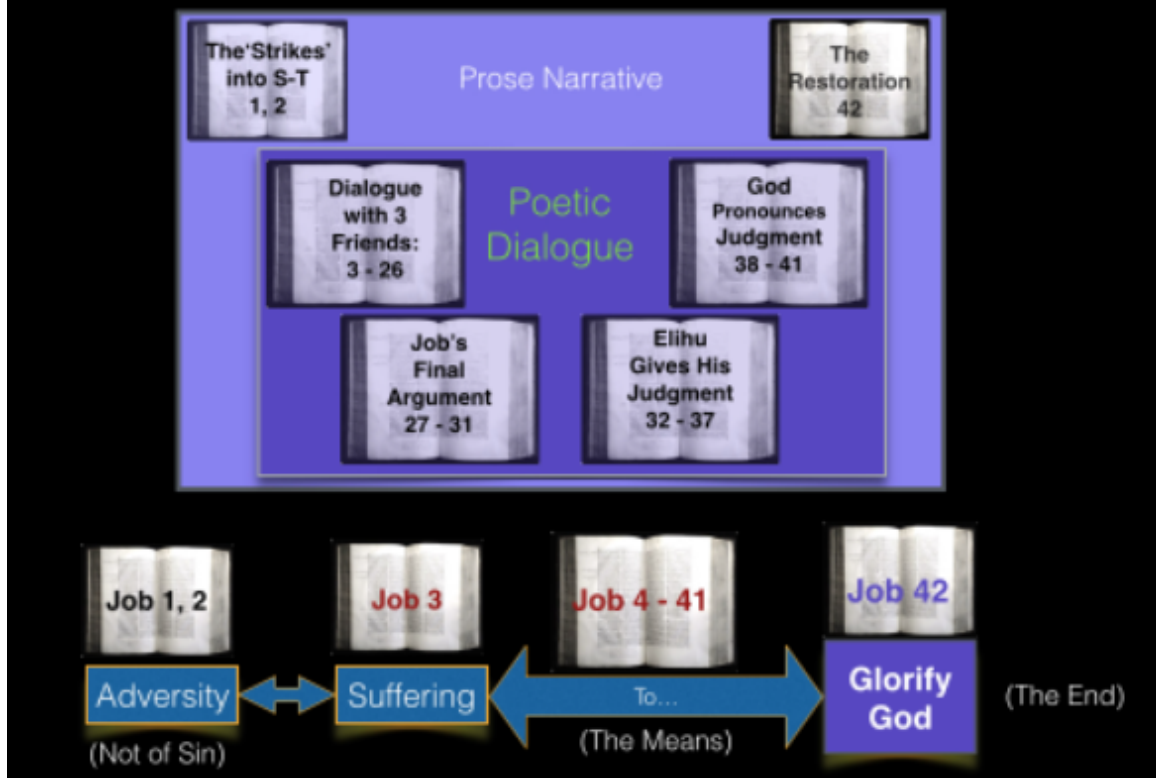
The Book of Job Related Blogpost		
Job 1-3	Job 4-37	Job 38-42
PROLOGUE: SITUATION Prose	DIALOGUE: SEARCH Poetry	EPILOGUE: SOLUTION Prose
Conflict	Debate	Repentance
Dilemma of Job	Debate of Job	Deliverance of Job
Disasters of Job	Dialogues with Job	Deliverance of Job
A Great Man A Great Examination	A Great Discussion	A Great Revelation A Great Vindication
Controversy Between Jehovah & Satan (Satan & the Saint)	Controversy Between Job & Three Friends Cycle 1 Eliphaz & Job (4-7) Bildad & Job (8-10) Zophar & Job (11-14) Cycle 2 Eliphaz & Job (15-17) Bildad & Job (18-19) Zophar & Job (20-21) Cycle 3 Eliphaz & Job (22-24) Bildad & Job (25-31) Elihu & Job (32-37)	Communication Between Jehovah & Job
Dialogue in Heaven	Dialogue on Earth	Dialogue Between Heaven & Earth
Job Tested & Despairing	Job Counseled	Job Approved
The Onset of Suffering	The Reality of Suffering	The Final Word from God
Challenge of Satan : 1-2 Complaint of Job: 3	Judgments of Men	Voice of God
Takes Place: Heaven & Earth	Takes Place: Land of Uz (North Arabia)	Takes Place: Heaven & Earth
Patriarchal Period (circa 2000 BC)		
Author Unknown		
The Problem of Pain The Blessing Through Suffering		

I-Dealmaking – A Bible Study Based on Book of Job

Where Does Job Fit in Bible History?



Overview of the Book of Job



7 Big Themes	3 Friends Space -Time Perspective	God Infinite - Eternal Ultimate Reality
#1 Know(ledge)	Man knows how to do good, God sees it, & is impressed	Man's knowing is Fallen
#2 Justice	Man can do justly, and God is compelled to respond	Man's sense of justice is warped; God is Incomprehensibly Just
#3 Beauty (Good)	Man's Great Life Formula, & his consequential prosperity.	The Work of Jesus Christ is the greatest possible Beauty
#4 Dealmaking	Man can use Dealmaking to control Almighty God	Jesus Christ performed a unique redemption with the Father for us
#5 Sovereignty	X (man is sovereign of self)	God is the Sovereign One, doing His Sovereign Purpose
#6 Grace (Love)	X (unnecessary)	God's Purpose toward His own is wrapped in His Grace
#7 Faith(fulness)	X (man's faith: the Great Life Formula)	God is the always Faithful One (& our Faith can rest on this)

<https://www.idealmaking.org/key-charts/>

David Clines: These three segments of the book, which we have identified from the story line and from the marks of closure, may now be analyzed as the three basic elements that are to be found in every story: **exposition, complication, resolution**. In the exposition the scene is set, the characters are introduced, and all the necessary conditions for the plot are established. In the complication, the characters encounter difficulties or dangers, and tensions emerge that excite the reader's curiosity as to how they can possibly be resolved. The resolution portrays how the narrative problem posed by the story is solved. . .

The shape of the book from these perspectives can now be displayed diagrammatically:

1:1—2:10 God afflicts Job exposition new character: Job

2:11—31:40 Job challenges God complication new characters: 3 friends

32:1—42:17 God challenges Job resolution new characters: Elihu, God

Francis Andersen: The massive speeches that make up the bulk of the book have been incorporated into the narrative framework with a symmetry that effects artistic harmony. At the same time there is a development in the tempo that leads from climax to climax, until the final resolution. The speeches are assembled in cycles through which tension is built up from stage to

stage. Thus the second interview with the Satan is more drastic than the first, and Yahweh's second address to Job is more tremendous than the first. The exchanges between Job and his friends become more and more heated as round follows round. But the drama does not move steadily upwards to its peak and then down through the dénouement to the end. Job's crowning speech is set off by using a beautiful poem on Wisdom (**chapter 28**) as an interlude after the three main cycles are finished. The tranquillity of this meditation contrasts with the turbulence before and after it, and provides needed relief for the reader. By a similar device the two most stupendous moments in the book—Job's final intrepid challenge (**chapters 29–31**) and Yahweh's overwhelming reply (**chapters 38–41**)—are kept apart by the speeches of Elihu (**chapters 32–37**), whose very slowness of movement creates an interval of suspense against which the words of the Lord become all the more majestic.

THEOLOGY AND APPLICATION:

Izak Cornelius: Central to the book of Job is the question of human suffering and especially why people who are seemingly innocent suffer, which in turn raises the question about the righteousness of a loving God. This book deals with the question of **retribution**, the popular theology according to which the righteous prosper but the wicked suffer, as well as the justice of the deity (the so-called question of **theodicy**). Job's suffering, along with his patience (see, e.g., **Jas. 5:11**), has become proverbial in everyday speech. The problems addressed by this book are truly part of universal human experience and therefore of world literature.

David Clines:

Many think that the essential question about suffering is, **Why suffering?** That is to say, What is its origin and cause, or, more personally, Why has this suffering happened to me? These are serious questions, but the Book of Job gives no satisfactory answer to them.

A second problem about suffering is whether there is such a thing as **innocent suffering**. The intellectual background of the book is obviously one in which cut-and-dried theologies of guilt and punishment have prevailed; for all the friends of Job, in their different ways, insist that if Job is suffering he must in some way be deserving of his suffering. It is still today a natural human tendency to ask, when one is suffering, What have I done to deserve this? The Book of Job, while of course it does not deny the possibility that sometimes suffering is richly deserved by the sufferer, speaks out clearly against the idea that such is always the case. Job is an innocent sufferer, whose innocence is not only asserted by himself (**6:30; 9:15**), but is attested to by the narrator (**1:1**), and above all by God (**1:8; 2:3; 42:7–8**). Nevertheless, even this question about the possibility of innocent suffering and the answer to it given by the book are not the primary issue in the book's concern with suffering.

The third, and essential, problem of suffering in the Book of Job may be said to be a more existential one, namely: **In what way am I supposed to suffer?** Or, What am I to do when I am suffering? To such questions the book gives two different but complementary answers. The first is expressed in the opening two chapters. Here Job's reaction to the disasters that come upon him is a **calm acceptance of the will of God**; he can bless God not only for what he has given but also for what he has taken away (**1:21; 2:10**). Sufferers who can identify with Job's acceptance

of his suffering, neither ignoring the reality of suffering by escaping into the past, nor so preoccupied with present grief as to ignore past blessing, are fortunate indeed. The patient Job of the prologue is a model for sufferers. But Job does not remain in that attitude of acceptance. Once we move into his poetic speeches, from **chap. 3** onward, we encounter a mind in turmoil, a sense of bitterness and anger, of isolation from God and even persecution by God. Job makes no attempt to suppress his hostility toward God for what has happened to him; he insists that he will “*speak in the anguish of [his] spirit*” and “*complain in the bitterness of [his] soul*” (7:11). What makes this protesting Job a model for other sufferers is that **he directs himself constantly toward God**, whom he regards as the one who is responsible, both immediately and ultimately, for his suffering. It is only because Job insists on response from God that God enters into dialogue with Job. Even though Job’s intellectual questions about the justice of his suffering are never adequately answered, he himself in the end is satisfied, as a sufferer, by his encounter with God.

Viewed as an answer to the problem of suffering, then, the argument of the Book of Job is: By all means let Job the patient be your model so long as that is possible for you; but when equanimity fails, let the grief and anger of Job the impatient direct itself and yourself toward God, for **only in encounter with him will be the tension of suffering be resolved**.

Elmer Smick: The author appears to have had a **multifaceted purpose** under the general theme of wisdom teaching about God and human suffering. The various parts of the book speak with somewhat different purposes in mind. The Prologue teaches the wisdom of human beings’ total submission to the will of the Creator. Readers view the drama from the divine perspective where they learn of God’s secret purpose to expose the falsehood of the Accuser and prove Job’s faith.

The Dialogue, by contrast, gives the human perspective. Job knows nothing of what has transpired in the heavenly council. The author’s purpose there is to teach the believing community some profound lessons positively and negatively about honesty and reality in our relationship with God and about humanity’s limited knowledge of the divine purposes. Here we see a deeper probing into the problem of evil than current views of theodicy have given. . .

As noted, the book does not attempt to formulate a rational solution to the problem of evil, especially that aspect of the problem that tries to relate God’s goodness and sovereignty to the suffering of the innocent. Although Job is exercised about God’s justice, his ultimate concern is more practical than theoretical. His practical concern is not healing and restoration but his own vindication as an upright man. Job does not ask for rational answers; nor does God give such to him when he appears, though Job is finally vindicated (42:7–9). There were no heinous sins for which he was being punished. When God does rebuke Job, it is for his ignorance (38:2) and presumption while arguing his case (42:2), not for a profligate life. God is apparently telling Job in **chapters 38–41** that human beings do not know enough about God’s ways to make judgments concerning his justice.

In his appearance to Job, God ignores the problem of theodicy. He gives no rational explanation or excuse for Job’s suffering, but Job is not crushed; he is only rebuked and then shown to be basically right, while the friends are condemned for their presumptive and arrogant claim to know God’s ways (42:7). Job thus realizes that God does not need his creature’s advice to

control the world and that no extreme of suffering gives human beings the right to question God's wisdom or justice, and at this realization he repents (42:2–6). On seeing the power and glory of God, Job's rebellious attitude dissolves and his resentment disappears. Job now gets what he sought for. His friends do not see him pronounced guilty, so their view of his suffering is refuted.

Robert Alden: Of the attributes of God, the ones that stand out in the Book of Job are sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, and justice. Less prominent are mercy, love, and goodness. Until the Lord appeared out of the whirlwind, Job complained that God was apathetic, blind to injustice, hidden, and unresponsive. For the four counselors certainly the justice of God was most prominent in their theology, with sovereignty nearly as important. Since Job said so little after God spoke to him, it is hard to know what his new view of God was; certainly it would have acknowledged God's power, faithfulness, generosity, and mercy. That God spoke to Job at all was the ultimate honor for Job and by itself would have rectified most of his misconceptions.

Tremper Longman: Many people (but few biblical scholars) think that job is a theodicy [justification of God], an attempt to explain suffering. Certainly suffering is a major component of the book. Nevertheless, wisdom, not suffering, is the main theme or message of the book. Job's suffering is the occasion for discussing wisdom. . . [the book] loudly and clearly denies that all suffering is the result of sin or that all suffering has the purpose of discipline. The cause of suffering is much too complex to be reduced to a single explanation that can be applied to every case. The book of Job serves as a warning to those who want to judge others based on the quality of their life.

John Piper: Job has about 29 chapters of **misapplied theology** in the middle. It's very hard to navigate your way through those chapters and determine what is true and what is not, because these guys are mixing up truth and falsehood all over the place. I think you're supposed to get the big picture that God was not happy with these three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

And when Elihu shows up, he, I believe, begins to set it right. Finally God speaks and he sets it completely right.

Then there is the last chapter that puts the closure on the whole thing. There it says that God brought all of this upon Job; and Job proves in the end to be a better man than these other men, even though Job himself sinned and had to repent in dust and ashes.

The lesson from the big book of Job is

- 1) that God is sovereign over all our suffering;
- 2) he permits Satan to come into our lives and do horrible things to us;
- 3) he means to prove our faith and purify our lives through it;
- 4) in the end he will make it good, either in this life or in the life to come; and
- 5) Satan does not have the last word in the lives of God's people.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-should-i-read-the-book-of-job>

John Robertson: Seven Lessons from Job

1. Patience:

At the conclusion of the New Testament book of James Christians are admonished to “*Be patient* (Greek – *makrothumeo*) *therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord... ye have heard of the patience* (Greek – *hupomone*) *of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful*” (**James 5:7, 11**). James had earlier admonished the suffering Christians of **chapter 1:2-4** to develop “*patience*” (*hupomone*) through their ill-fated happenings. The Greek *hupomone* means endurance and perseverance in the face of intense trials of life (see Moulton’s Greek Word study pp. 418). Note that James uses the Greek word “*makrothumeo*” at **James 5:7** in relation to “*waiting with patient expectation*” for the coming of the Lord (Moulton 256). James was encouraging persecuted Christians to patiently endure their current trials of life because their expectation of Christ’s second coming would soon occur. James relates this to Job because the man of God endured the horrid suffering, earlier mentioned, by Satan and sinful men because he knew that his redeemer lived and that there was something better awaiting him in eternity (**Job 19:25-26; 27:5-6**). Likewise, the suffering Christian today ought to patiently endure the hardships of this life knowing that our glory awaits us in heaven (see **I Pet. 5:6**).

2. Know your Place:

People embarrass themselves when they make it apparent that they do not know their proper place. Likewise when man does not make the proper distinction between deity and flesh he shames himself. Jehovah had accused Job of reasoning by way of “*dark counsel*” (**Job 38:2**). Job had foolishly accused God of being unfair, unjust, and unmerciful. The only way one can successfully charge Jehovah with such error is to be His superior (i.e., deity). The Lord tells Job that when he can prove that he has the knowledge and power of deity He would admit that he was correct in his charges (**Job 40:14**). Many foolish men of darkened counsel attempt to take the place of deity by altering God’s revelation to fit their own beliefs (see **II Thess. 2:1ff**). These foolish men take the kingdom of God by force (**Lk. 16:16**). Such an endeavor is a futile exercise in fleshly reasoning and ends in man’s spiritual and eternal death (**Rom. 8:5-8**). Let us all know our place before the Almighty Jehovah. We may study the science of God’s creation; however, God created it and put it in its proper order (see **Ps. 33:6-9**). Man can scarcely bear the weight of anxiety produced by his own life much less that of all eternity. The prophet Isaiah said, “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts*” (**Isa. 55:9**).

3. Bible Perfection:

Jesus said, “*Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (**Matt. 5:48**). The apostles of Jesus Christ also taught that the Christian must be perfect (see **II Cor. 13:11; Col. 1:28; 4:12**). Job is identified as “*perfect*” by Jehovah (see **Job 1:1, 8, 2:3**). Bildad, like so many confused disciples today, refused to believe man can be perfect (see **Job 25** all). What Bildad, and many others today, do not understand about Bible perfection is that it is not comprehensive but rather a current state of being. Job had sinned in his past yet the Lord identified him as perfect (see **Job 13:23-28**). Likewise, we all have sinned in our past and probably will stumble in the future (see **I Jn. 1:8-10**). When sin occurs in the Christian’s life we are commanded to repent and ask the Lord’s forgiveness (**Acts 8:22**). By the power of Christ’s blood man is forgiven and viewed as perfect (see **Eph. 1:7; Heb. 7:18-19; 10:1ff**). Job’s perfection, like ours today, is found in a life of humility and effort in pursuit of the forgiveness of sins (see **Job 1:5ff; Phil.**

3:15). Our ever present objective is heaven! Job, in the end, confesses his error and humbly repents before the Almighty as we all ought to do (**Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6**). The man of God rightly states, “*Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding*” (**Job 28:28**). The Christian is to do no less today (see **II Cor. 7:10**).

4. Satan’s Devices:

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that we “*are not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices*” (**II Cor. 2:11**). The devil’s business is to ruin men’s eternal soul (see **Job 1:7; I Pet. 5:8-9**). Satan uses “*devices*” to draw men from truth into the lusts of the world (**James 4:7; I Jn. 2:15-17**). The book of Job illustrates a great tool of Satan. Through Job’s three friends the devil tried to “convince” the perfect man of God that he was not perfect (see **Job 32:12**). Job; however, maintained his innocence through the whole ordeal. Many false teachers today will try to shake the Christian’s confidence by saying, “You can’t be perfect... no one can possibly know all truth... there is no way unity can be achieved in the church... surely God will not condemn us for one un-forgiven sin...” As Satan succeeded in the Garden of Eden so he succeeds with men today (see **Gen. 3:1-6**). Satan’s confidence in Job’s spiritual collapse; however, was proved wrong. Job was victorious over Satan and so you and I can be (**Job 42:1-6; I Cor. 15:57; I Jn. 5:4**).

5. Situational Ethics:

A large part of Job’s darkened counsel was that he tried to justify his complaints against God due to his current distress (see **Job 2:9-10; 7:11ff; 10:1-2; 12:11-12**; etc.). Many today believe that one’s environmental conditions determine their moral standing. Situational ethics is defined as “A system of ethics (the rules or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession) based on brotherly love in which acts are morally evaluated (judged) within a situational context (position with regard to surrounding conditions and attendant circumstances) rather than by application of moral absolutes” (**AHD 1145**). The Bible reveals that man is not judged by his surrounding circumstances but rather by divine revelation (**Jn. 12:48**). The Lord condemned Job’s unlawful complaints and accusations and so He does to all who try to justify their wrong deeds by their environment (**Job 38:1ff**). Consider two New Testament examples to illustrate this point. Many of the Hebrew Christians were being persecuted. They were made a “*gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions... and the spoiling of your possessions*” (**Heb. 10:33ff**). Though they had suffered much the fact remained that if they fall away from the Lord in sin it would be impossible to renew them to repentance as long as they continued in that sin (see **Heb. 6:5-6**). Many of the Galatians had also attempted to escape the afflicting hand of persecution by accepting erring doctrines (see **Gal. 6:12**). Did Paul excuse the Galatians due to their persecution? No! Paul said, “*Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace*” (**Gal. 5:4**). God’s word is the only standard man is eternally judged by (see **Dan. 5:27; Hos. 5:10-11; Amos 7:7-8; Matt. 7:21- 24; Eph. 2:20**; etc.).

6. Wealth and Responsibility:

The Bible does not teach that it is sinful to have wealth. Job was a very wealthy man (**Job 1:3**) as was other Bible men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the wise king Solomon. Job explains that the sin of having riches is the reaching after them (see **Job 31:24-28**). The apostle Paul wrote Timothy about riches saying, “*But they that are MINDED to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and*

perdition. For the LOVE of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some REACHING after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Tim. 6:9-10). Those “minded... have a love for... and are reaching” after the riches of this world forget the cleansing of their sins and the importance of our eternal heavenly treasures as they enjoy what this immediate world offers. Those who do have the wealth of this world would do well to follow Job’s example and give to the poor, widows, aged, sick, and orphans (see Job 29:12ff).

7. Why do people suffer in this life?

Job repeatedly asked God to explain why a righteous man was suffering (see Job 6:10, 24; 7:20; 24:1 etc.). While the Lord never gives Job an answer to his question the man of God nonetheless draws some right conclusions. Job had observed that both the righteous and wicked suffer in this life (Job 2:10; 5:7; 21:25-26). Job even noted that there are times when the wicked prosper and are very happy while the righteous suffer (see Job 21:7-14). Solomon confirmed these observations saying, “The wise man’s eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness: and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all” (Eccl. 2:14; see also Eccl. 8:12-13; 9:1ff). Job made further observations. Job stated that man is being tested and refined by God during these days of affliction that they may come forth as gold (see Job 23:10). The New Testament confirms Job’s observations as truth for today. Those who choose to permit suffering to refine (I Pet. 1:6-8) and strengthen (James 1:1ff) them will never be disappointed. Rather than asking, “Why do I suffer,” we ought to look forward to a time when the anguish of this life will end. Heaven ought to be cherished and longed for by every right thinking man and woman because the groaning of this life that comes to all (see Rom. 8:22-23) shall end for the faithful (see Rev. 21:1-7).

<http://www.floralheightschurchofchrist.org/Class%20-%20Bible%20Books/Job.pdf>

Thomas Constable:

The central subject of the book is the **basis of the divine-human relationship**. The greatest value of the book is its revelation of the **sufficiency of God’s grace** when all the props that support life crumble. Job learned that even though God did not deliver him from his trials, He was with him in those trials. God’s apparent absence from him made him despair, but when God finally revealed Himself, Job rested in God’s fellowship.

The writer recorded the process by which God allowed Satan to strip Job of all the supports of life, so that he finally had nothing to lean on but God. We can identify eight things that Job lost, things which most people lean on for support as they go through life.

- First, Job lost his wealth (1:13-17). Later in the book he mentioned that when he lost his wealth, he also lost the respect of his acquaintances. So he lost both his material prosperity and the respect that comes with it.
- Second, he lost his children (1:18-19).
- Third, he lost his health (2:7-9).
- Fourth, he lost the support of his wife (2:9). The woman who should have comforted and encouraged him in his afflictions as his closest friend turned against him. **John Chrysostom**, the early church father, wrote that Satan did not destroy Job’s wife, along with his children, because he wanted to use her to afflict Job.

- Fifth, he lost his friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu. These men have come in for a lot of criticism, and much of it is deserved. With friends like them, who needs enemies? But they were true friends, if unwise. They came and visited him in his grief. They sat silent with him for seven days before they said anything. When they finally spoke, they spoke directly to him rather than gossiping about him to other people. However, they misunderstood Job. They continued to accuse him, even when he denied committing the sins they accused him of committing. And they attacked him viciously and repeatedly, rather than comforting and encouraging him.
- Sixth, Job lost his own sense of his individual worth as a human being (6:8-9). He had become, by this time, more discouraged than how he felt right after his wealth and children had been taken from him (cf. 1:21a).
- Seventh, He lost his sense of contact with a gracious God (7:20). He had felt God was gracious earlier (cf. 1:21b).
- Eighth, and finally, he lost his conviction that God governed justly (9:2). He earlier believed that God was just (cf. 2:10).

In summary, Job lost all the things people lean on for support in life: material possessions, the respect of other people, children, health, a supportive spouse, true friends, self-respect and a sense of personal worth, a sense of God's presence, and confidence in God's justice. All that was left for Job was himself and his belief that God existed. Even though he still believed God existed, he no longer had any sense of God's fellowship with himself. He lost his feeling of relationship with God. **He felt completely cut off from God.** I believe the primary application of the Book of Job is that we do not need to know why God does what He does if we know Him. Job is a book that deals with **persevering faith** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7).

Some of the **practical lessons** the Book of Job teaches include the following:

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

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

David Malick: Purposes of Book of Job:

A. To demonstrate that God is worthy of love apart from the blessings He provides.

- B. To explain that God may allow suffering as a means to purify and strengthen a person in godliness.
- C. To emphasize that man is unable to view life from God's vast perspective.
- D. To explore the justice of God who treats the righteous with suffering.
- E. To demonstrate to the evil angels (Satan) that God's practice of blessing the righteous is not a hindrance to the development of true righteousness.
- F. To address Mankind's wrestling with affliction which defies human explanation.

Free Bible Lessons: 16 Life Lessons from the Book of Job

#1 - Overcoming Adversity – 1:20-22

Job's life was in ruins, His financial security had come crashing down four times in a row. His family had been destroyed in a natural disaster. Everything that had made his life happy had been wiped out.

Job's response was twofold. He grieved heavily (**v.20**) like any normal person would. Then he worshiped God. It is only when we acknowledge the power of God that we can put life in perspective. God never promised us an easy life, but he does promise to be with us always.

#2 - Comfort for Those Who Hurt – 2:11-13

When a friend is suffering or a family is grieving, we rarely know what to say. The sincere words of compassion we use can sound hollow and meaningless. Job's three friends heard of his suffering and came to visit, and they did a remarkable thing. Rather than filling the air with small talk and idle chatter, they sat with Job in silence. For an entire week, they remained by his side in support of their friend.

We can learn an important lesson from this. Job's friends brought comfort... until they opened their mouths (**Job 4**).

#3 - Many Miracles - 5:9, 10

God's miracles are "more than we can count." there are real miracles all around for those who can see them - the movements of the heavens, the beauty of the earth, the gift of life, the wonder of friendship. These are all miracles.

We are surrounded every day with marvelous gifts from God, yet we often call them "ordinary." look for his gifts in your world today.

#4 - I Give Up – 6:8-10

Job was filled with anguish. He knew that he was blameless and full of integrity. And yet his suffering was unyielding. God seemed to be against him and he didn't know why. He had been betrayed by his fair-weather friends who turned against him when the heat was on (**vv.15-17**). In his pain, Job wanted to give up, be released from his circumstances, and die.

When the stress of life overwhelms despite your efforts to live the kind of life that pleases God, you must not think that he is no longer on your side. We may not comprehend the ways of God (**Ecclesiastes 11:5**) or figure out why he allows certain things to happen. However, we can be confident that in the end God himself will bring us out of despair and make us complete, steady, strong, and firm (1 Peter 5:10).

#5 - Despair in the Midst of Suffering – 7:1-21

Life is hard. There's no getting around that fact. When the circumstances of suffering build to a crescendo, despair comes crashing in. It seems there is nowhere to turn. The family is powerless, and God seems absent.

Job cried out his distress in a way that echoes our own. His pain was unbearable, he couldn't sleep, he felt hemmed in, and he had come to the end of his rope. But wait - this is not the end of the story. While Job raged, God listened quietly waiting for his opportunity to answer Job's cries. It is okay to express our anguish to God as long as we remember to give him time to respond.

#6 - Everyone Needs a Mediator – 9:33

One of the big differences between games played in the backyard and those played on a professional field is the presence of the referee. This person acts as a mediator between players and enforces the rules of the game. In his despair, Job cried out for someone to stand between God and himself. He wished for someone who could plead his case before the Almighty - a referee.

But there was no one who could represent Job, and he certainly could not think of anyone who could represent God. However, we are blessed to know that Jesus Christ, God's Son, is our Mediator (**1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:24**). His death on the cross stands between the judgment of God and the sins of humanity. It is because of his death and resurrection that we can make our lives right with God. Job's hope of a mediator had become our reality.

#7 - God Watches Over Us - 10:9-12

Often Job is characterized as a complainer who was merely venting his anger and frustration at his friends and at God. Hidden within Job's complaints are faint glimmers of hope that shine brightly through the background of his despair.

Here Job recognized that God did care for him. He has been a vital part of our lives since our conception. We may not understand the why of our circumstances, but it is a good idea to stop for a moment and reflect on the kindness and care that God has shown to us to this point. It is only because of his compassion for us that we have all we need.

#8 - Secret Sins - 11:13-15

We all have secret sins - those things in our lives that we don't want anyone, especially God, to know about. The good news is that we don't have to struggle to hide those sins anymore. God already knows them. He knows exactly what our secret sins are.

When we surrender our hearts to God and "turn to him in prayer," he will be quick to forgive all

our sins - even those we wish he didn't know about! He will graciously replace our shame with confidence so we might live with strength and fearlessness.

#9 - Unwavering Trust - 13:15

The saying goes that "those who are strong are only strong in God, and those who are strong in God rise above all the circumstances of human life." The daily disciplines of the Christian life develop our character and strengthen our capacity for enduring the trials of life.

Was Job less spiritual because his property was gone; less genuine because he had lost his social standing, or prayerless because he was no longer wealthy? No! his ability to withstand the suffering that Satan had thrown at him arose not through a single act or one effort. Rather, Job's character had matured over many years of faithful service to God through a lifestyle of prayer and obedience to him (**Job 1:1, 5**)

Job's amazing declaration of unwavering trust in God is a powerful inspiration to anyone ready to give up on God. The true believer walks by faith, and not by sight. Job's trust was not based on the seen, but on the unseen. His possessions, children, and friends were gone, yet he still says, *"The Lord alone gives and takes. Praise the name of the Lord!"* (**Job 1:21**). This is faith, not sight.

#10 - How We Die - 14:1-14

There is a lot of talk today about "dying with dignity." It runs rampant among the courts, the talk shows, and the best-seller lists. Unless our death is sudden and unexpected, we will all face the moment when we realize that our life on earth is over. And most of us have a concern about "dying well."

Is there a secret to dying well? It truly is no secret because it was revealed long ago - for our dying hand to be in the grasp of the living Christ is the secret to dying well. Not the lack of pain, not the presence of family and friends, and not the compassion of a kind doctor. It is love of God that puts the fear of death in its place.

#11 - A Bed of Darkness - 17:11-15

These words were spoken in a moment of deep depression. Job's emotions went back and forth from faith to bleak despair.

We can think of our lives as slender candles. Once the wick has been consumed there is no more time remaining. Those who have spent their lives with no regard for God and eternity are making a bed of darkness for themselves. This is also true for those who are obsessed with making money and spending it on themselves.

What kind of hope is that? Rather than trivialize our lives, let's concern ourselves with eternal matters. Begin today to prepare for yourself a bed of hope.

#12 - Finding God - 23:3

Life only has meaning when we focus on God. He is not always easily found because he does not

reveal himself on billboards along the road of life. Sometimes his presence is a mystery that surrounds us, causing us to peer this way and that, looking for evidence of him (v.8).

When our eyes are looking for God, our attention is pulled away from ourselves. Our petty concerns fade into the background and the glimpse of God scatter the shadows from the corners of our souls.

#13 - The Silence of God - 26:14

"Why doesn't God speak to us anymore?" is a question that had plagued many of us. What we need to realize is that his words are written upon the pages of his creation, and his syllables are spoken by ten thousand voices. It is our ears that are deaf and do not listen to his sweet voice. It is our eyes that are blind to the words written in the sky. It is the heart of humanity that is dull and sluggish in the presence of the living God.

We must stop to peel the scales from our eyes and remove the plugs from our ears in order to train our hearts to hear the whisper of God's voice. Then we can truly begin to seek the face of God and hear his voice.

#14 - Fool's Gold - 28:12-24

Money has become an idol for many people today, but such idolization is meaningless in the eyes of God (**Ecclesiastes 6:2**). There are seven different Hebrew words for gold, and at least four of them appear in this chapter. The gold discussed in these verses is a refined gold gathered as a treasure.

Money can buy many things, but it can't buy the jewels of peace, love, joy, or happiness. With God, our wealth is of no concern. Everyone is treated equally before his throne. The foolish person does not mind being trapped in the world of financial gain, whereas the wise person abides in the freedom of God's wisdom.

#15 - The Light of God - 37:19-24

The great German teacher **Neander** once said, "I see before us a deep abyss, but above it shines a bright light. It is the dawn, or is it the evening twilight?" Today we stand before the godless abyss of our society. The clouds of unbelief are rolled back and we begin to see a glimpse of the light of God.

Does the light grow dimmer with each passing day because of our sins? Or does it become brighter, exposing our hidden sins? May our eyes be opened to the brilliance of God's glory and his compassion on us.

#16 -- Job Meets God – 38:39 – 42:6

Until this time, Job's knowledge of God was based on what he had heard from others. Now God unveils as much of himself as Job's senses can bear - the beauty of nature and the wonders of the animal kingdom. The animals listed by God all have a love for freedom. Although some are predators, others can be domesticated. Such is the depth and breadth of God's creation.

From the stars in the heavens to the insects crawling beneath our feet, God puts all this in place.

How can we complain about trivial problems before such a mighty God? He doesn't want our worry; He doesn't want our worry; he wants our worship.

As Job realizes that he has "*talked about things . . . beyond my understanding*" (42.3) he is ashamed of his former pride. This kind of humility is the first way we are affected when we come to know God as he is. Humility and rising above personal suffering is the key to a greater understanding of the power of God.

<https://simplelessonsfromthebible.blogspot.com/2018/08/16-life-lessons-and-commentary-from-book-of-job-bible-study.html>

Courtney Joseph: 10 Lessons from the Book of Job

1.) Bad things happen to good people.

The book of Job opens in verse one by telling us that Job was a blameless, upright man who feared God and turned away from evil. Then...his life unraveled. Job's suffering did not come because he was bad but rather because of his unwavering faithfulness to God. (**Job 1:8**)

2.) In the midst of suffering, we must never lose our hope in God.

One of the greatest statements of faith in all of scripture is found right in the middle of Job chapter 13. Job says: "*Though he slay me, I will hope in him.*" No one and nothing can steal your joy or your peace when your hope is in God. Never lose your hope in God!

3.) Our friends may fail us in the midst of our misery but God never does.

Job's friends put him on the defense. Job said of his three friends: "*Miserable comforters are you all!*" (**16:2**) Job proclaims where his deep strength flows from:

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
27 whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!*
~**Job 19:25-27**

One day – we will see with our own eyes our Redeemer! He is alive today and forevermore and because He lives – we can face tomorrow with victory!

4.) Even in the midst of God's silence, His presence is with us.

Job wrestled and wrestled with God's silence in the midst of his suffering. Over 25 times he asked the question "why?" and he continually asked for the opportunity to defend his case before God. Job had entered the fiery furnace of suffering.

Job writes:

*But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*

*11 My foot has held fast to his steps;
I have kept his way and have not turned aside.
12 I have not departed from the commandment of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.*
~Job 23:10-12

5.) Wisdom comes from fearing God and turning away from evil.

Humility is key. Pride can interfere with us following the wise ways of the Lord. And when pride interferes it clouds our vision, and before we know it – we are on the wrong path towards evil. Job explains in **Job 28:28**:

*‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
and to turn away from evil is understanding.’*

6.) God is with us in the midst of our storms.

The Lord is our good shepherd and He never leaves our side. He walks with us through the valleys. He restores our soul when we are weary. He leads us to the path of righteousness when we have lost our way. He gives us courage when we are scared and he comforts us when we are hurting. Our God is the God of the storm.

7.) God is in control.

God is the creator of the universe. He is mighty and powerful. We can trust Him with our lives. We see in Job chapter one, that nothing came into the life of Job which did not first go through the hands of his loving God. Every page of scripture points to a sovereign God – from the creation account in Genesis to the return of Christ in Revelation, our God is in complete control.

8.) Sometimes, in the midst of our suffering, we sin.

God accepts a humble and repentant heart. In **Job 42**, we see Job surrender to God and repent. Job recognized that God is the creator and he is just his creation.

I despise myself, and repent in the dust of ashes.
~Job 42:6

9.) Sometimes we sin against our friends.

Job’s friends not only failed to be there for Job in a supportive, loving way but they gave poor advice based on their misunderstandings of God.

The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: *“My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.”*
~Job 42:7

10.) After repentance and forgiveness comes blessings.

In **Job 42**, Job made a burnt offering for his friends and prayed for them as God commanded Him to do. God accepted Job’s prayer for them and THEN Job’s fortunes were restored WHEN he prayed for his friends!

Isn't this an interesting connection? Job forgave his friends BEFORE he knew how blessed he was about to become. It was Job's prayer that released blessings!

"The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning."
~Job 42:12

David Atkinson: We must finally draw some threads together from the whole of our study of this remarkable book.

First, there are more things in heaven and earth than we have ever dreamt of. Job is being caught up into purposes of God of which he knows nothing. There are uncertainties, puzzles and ambiguities in the life of faith which we have to leave within the mystery of God. *"The secret things belong to the Lord."* We must allow God to have his secrets, and receive from him the gift of faith to hold on to him in our uncertainties. Job is above all the Great Believer. May God deepen our faith, even when we are in the dark.

Secondly, there is a warning against inappropriate preaching even of the truth. We saw an insensitivity in the three friends, as they tried to force Job to fit in to their theories, becoming increasingly hardened in their attitudes as he refused to be molded to their shape. We will never help people if we come to them with predetermined theories and try to squeeze them into our mold. We need rather to learn from the opening scene on the ash heap the ministry of listening, of just being there.

Thirdly, we have seen vividly displayed before our eyes and our emotions, the fact that God's people do suffer. . .

Fourthly, we recall the difference between a belief in what Pascal called "the God of the philosophers" and faith in the living God who makes himself known. . . We know God only as he has made himself known. . .

Fifthly, *"you have heard of Job's perseverance"* – so writes James. . . Here is a man who has listened to the voice of his conscience, and held firm under adversity. . .

Sixthly, the law of retribution and a concentration on guilt needs to be set in the broader context of the law of love and a concentration on grace. . .

Seventhly, what matters most from this book is not the preaching or the theology, nor orthodox belief or even Job's own upright character. Important as all these are, they find their place only in the light of that which is more important than them all, namely walking with God in fellowship with him, to enjoy him in his world. . . finding God's grace to be sufficient . . .

Finally, from this perspective, we can take heart from the depths of Job's sufferings. Suffering will end: but when, we do not know. But we do know that the Lord will come and he will transform our "wounds into worship". That is the word of hope from Job for people who are waiting with anxiety and uncertainty – wondering, maybe, where God is in their lives. The Lord will come!

We are not promised freedom from suffering in this world. “*In the world you will have tribulation.*” Nor are we let into all of God’s secrets. But we are promised grace. For some, there may be healing and restoration in this life. For others, that gift awaits them in the “*new heavens and the new earth*” where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more death. But for all of us, here and now, there is grace, and there can be hope.

John MacArthur: we can see the following truths in Job’s experience:

- 1) There are matters going on in heaven with God that believers know nothing about; yet, they affect their lives;
- 2) Even the best effort at explaining the issues of life can be useless;
- 3) God’s people do suffer. Bad things happen all the time to good people, so one cannot judge a person’s spirituality by his painful circumstances or successes;
- 4) Even though God seems far away, perseverance in faith is a most noble virtue since God is good and one can safely leave his life in His hands;
- 5) The believer in the midst of suffering should not abandon God, but draw near to Him, so out of the fellowship can come the comfort -- without the explanation; and
- 6) Suffering may be intense, but it will ultimately end for the righteous and God will bless abundantly.

Greg W. Parsons: Theology of Job

The Book of Job presents a lofty view of God as One worthy of our worship and trust no matter how enigmatic our circumstances. A person ought to trust God even when his ways are inscrutable (**Job 42:2-3**; cf. **Job 5:9; 9:10-12; 11:6-9**). Yet the book also teaches that we may ask honest questions of God when we do not understand “why?” (**Job 3:11-20; 10:18; 13:24; 24:1-12**) or even express strong emotions such as bitterness (**Job 7:11; 10:1**) or anger. The Lord does not give a direct answer to Job’s question “why?”, but communicates that when things seem chaotic and senseless he himself is still in charge. The book as a whole teaches that God is ultimately the author of pain and suffering (**Job 5:18**), which he may use for various purposes (**Job 5:17; 23:10; 33:16-30**). Since Satan cannot inflict suffering without God’s express permission (**Job 1:12; 2:6**), believers can find strength from the assurance that God sovereignly limits Satan’s evil activities.

The heated debate between the impatient Job and his dogmatic “friends” must not overshadow Job’s overall example of practical holiness and ethical purity. Job’s model of a blameless servant fearing God (**Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 42:2-6, 7-8**) and the message of the book demonstrate that reverential submission is always the proper response for believers—whether in prosperity or tragedy. Job’s blameless record as a neighbor and city official (**Job 29:12-17; 31:16-23**), including pure inward motivations (**Job 31:1-2, 24-25, 33-34**) and attitudes (**Job 31:1, 7, 9, 26-27, 29-30**) toward God and neighbor, are lofty ethical standards to emulate. This example is unique and unparalleled until the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**).

Bob Utley: The real issue is, “Can we trust YHWH in the midst of life’s crooked path (human suffering)?”

1. The three friends give the traditional answers
2. Job says they do not fit his case
3. **Job 28** is the author’s (a Judean sage) answer
4. Elihu gives an answer (**Job 32-37**)
5. God gives His answer (**Job 38:1-42:6**). . .

God never reveals to Job the reason behind his sufferings. **Life is a mystery.** Trust in God is more important than information! The longer I live and study both life and the Scriptures the more I am forced to affirm “mystery” as a valid theological category.

My hope and answer to questions like

1. what about those who have never heard?
2. what about those who die young?
3. what about those who cannot understand?
4. what about evil and suffering in the world?
5. what about violence in nature and disease?

For me, knowing the **character of the God of the Bible** gives me peace that He will deal fairly and graciously with His creation! . . .

I am surprised how many people are helped by Job because the suffering of a “blameless” man does not fit many people’s lives. However, the questions of “Why me?” “Why this?” “Why now?” are part of everyone’s life. As Job never knew “why,” so people must face an **unsure life!** For those who believe there is a God, a good God, who created this world and each of us for a purpose, the questions about Him and His ways with humans are central (God is the main character of every Bible book). This is the issue that calls to each of us. Job does not answer this question but fellowship is possible.

Peter Wallace: Before you can see how Job speaks to you, you need to see first how Job shows you Jesus! Because when God says to Satan, “*Have you considered my servant Job?*” he uses a word “*my servant*” which he elsewhere applies to

- “*my servant Abraham*” (**Gen 26:24**),
- “*my servant Moses*” (**Numbers 12:7-8; Joshua 1:2, 7**),
- “*my servant Caleb*” (**Numbers 14:24**),
- “*my servant David*” (**2 Samuel 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kings 11**)
- “*my servant Isaiah*” (**Isaiah 20:3**), and
- “*my servant Israel*” (**Isaiah 41-53**, etc.)

Job is the servant of the LORD – the innocent one who suffers for no fault of his own. “*It pleased the LORD to crush him*” – that is what Isaiah will say about the suffering servant; it is what the book of Job will say about Job. “*My servant Job*” is about to become the “*suffering servant*” – he is about to suffer all that Israel was supposed to suffer. And in this way Job is set

before us as a picture of Christ. For our Lord Jesus Christ – the suffering servant – *did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

William Cowper:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm

You fearful saints,
fresh courage take:
The clouds you so much dread
are big with mercy,
and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
but trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
faith sees a smiling face.
Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

OUTLINE OF JOB

PERPLEXING HUMAN SUFFERING AND INSCRUTABLE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

BIG IDEA:

**SUBMISSION TO GOD’S INSCRUTABLE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY
FORTIFIES PERSEVERANCE AND VINDICATES GOD’S
RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE MIDST OF PERPLEXING HUMAN
SUFFERING**

(1:1 – 2:13) PROLOGUE – HARSH REALITY OF PERPLEXING SUFFERING

**A. (1:1-5) Introduction to Job’s Character – Piety, Prosperity and Priestly Precaution –
The Hero of the Story Is Introduced as a Godly Man of Unrivalled Integrity, Wealth and
Family Blessing**

- 1. (:1) Job’s Piety and Integrity – His Wisdom
 - a. Identity of the Godly Man
 - 1) Identity by Location
 - 2) Identity by Name
 - b. Idealized Godly Characteristics
 - 1) Blameless
 - 2) Upright
 - 3) God-Fearer
 - 4) Evil-Hater
- 2. (:2-3) Job’s Prosperity – His Wealth
 - a. (:2) Perfect Family
 - b. (:3a) Plentiful Possessions
 - c. (:3b) Preeminent Reputation
- 3. (:4-5) Job’s Priestly Precaution to Preserve Holiness – His Watchfulness
 - a. (:4) Sibling Special Feasts
 - b. (:5) Sin Offerings to Ensure Careful Consecration
 - 1) Consecration Offerings
 - 2) Careful Consideration
 - 3) Consistent Practice

B. (1:6 – 2:13) Introduction of Job’s Shocking and Severe Trials

- 1. (1:6-12) The Challenge Initiating Job’s Trials –
The Removal of Prosperity Puts Our Devotion to God to the Test –
God Allows Satan to Test Job’s Motivation for Worship
 - (:6) Prologue – Satan Approaches God
 - a. (:7-8) Divine Testimony to Job’s Devotion –
Two Questions from the Lord to Satan
 - 1) (:7) Question #1 – What Is Satan Up To?
 - 2) (:8) Question #2 – What is Job Up To?
 - b. (:9-12) Satanic Challenge of Job’s Motivation for Devotion
 - 1) (:9-11) Challenge Proposed
 - a) (:9) The Provoking Taunt

- b) (:10) The Protective Hedge of Blessing
 - c) (:11) The Proposed Test
 - 2) (:12a) Challenge Accepted
 - (:12b) Epilogue – Satan Departs from God
- 2. (1:13-22) Passing the First Test –
Maintaining Devotion to God When Overwhelmed by Disasters –
Seemingly Undeserved Disasters Test Our Spiritual Foundation
 - (:13) Prologue – Prosperity and Peace
 - a. (:14-19) Four Disasters Reported to Job – One Right after the Other –
How Severe Are Your Trials/
 - 1) (:14-15) Loss of Farm Animals and Servants
 - 2) (:16) Loss of Flocks and Shepherds
 - 3) (:17) Loss of Camels and Servants
 - 4) (:18-19) Loss of Children
 - b. (:20-21) Godly Response of Job –
How Do You Respond to Adversity?
 - 1) (:20) Worshiping God While Mourning
 - 2) (:21) Blessing God While Being Bankrupted
 - (:22) Epilogue – Unchanging Spiritual Equilibrium
- 3. (2:1-13) Passing the Second Test –
Maintaining Integrity in Times of Perplexing Suffering –
Satan’s Intensified Attacks Fail to Cause Job to Fail
 - (:1) Prologue – Second Heavenly Council
 - 1) Presence of Sons of God
 - 2) Presence of Satan
 - a. (:2-7) Intensified Test of Job
 - 1) (:2-3) Repetition of the Lord’s Two Questions to Satan
 - a) (:2) Regarding the Activity of Satan – Pursuing the Righteous
 - b) (:3) Regarding the Activity of Job – Passing the Test
 - 2) (:4-6) Response of Satan
 - a) (:4) Cynicism of Satan
 - b) (:5) Challenge of Satan
 - c) (:6) Concession by the Lord
 - 3) (:7) Physical Attack against Job
 - b. (:8-10) Integrity of Job Maintained Despite Variety of Responses to His Trial
 - 1) (:8) Physical Response of Job
 - 2) (:9) Pressuring Response from Job’s Wife
 - 3) (:10a) Patient Response of Job
 - 4) (:10b) Passing the Second Test by Maintaining His Integrity
 - c. (:11-13) Introduction of Job’s Three Friends as They Provide Silent Support
 - 1) (:11) Commitment to Comfort
 - 2) (:12) Weeping over Job’s Wretched Condition
 - 3) (:13) Spending Time with Job in Sorrowful Silence

I. (3:1 – 31:40) DIALOGUES OF DEBATE – 3 CYCLES

A. (3:1-26) Initial Complaint of Job – 3 Death Wishes -- When Tranquility Erupts into Unrelenting Turmoil Our Troubled Spirit Can

Strenuously Complain

- (:1) Prologue – Job Speaks and Curses His Birth
- 1. (:2-10) The Wish that He Had Not Been Born
 - a. (:2-3) Curse on the Day and Night of His Birth
 - 1) Curse on the Day of His Birth
 - 2) Curse on the Night of His Birth
 - b. (:4-5) Curse on the Day of His Birth
 - c. (:6-9) Curse on the Night of His Birth
 - 1) (:6) Let It be Dark
 - 2) (:7) Let It be Barren and Joyless
 - 3) (:8) Let It be Cursed and Chaotic
 - 4) (:9) Let It be Dark
 - d. (:10) Reason for His Curse
- 2. (:11-19) The Wish that He Had Died at Birth
 - a. (:11-12) Why Not Die Right After Being Born
 - b. (:13-15) Death Viewed as the Entrance into the Leveling Field of Rest
 - 1) (:13) Desirability of Rest and Tranquility
 - 2) (:14) Destiny of the Highest Achievers
 - 3) (:15) Destiny of the Wealthiest Princes
 - c. (:16) Why Not Die in the Womb
 - d. (:17-19) Death Viewed as Escape from Earthly Suffering
 - 1) (:17) No More Affliction
 - 2) (:18) No More Oppression
 - 3) (:19) No More Distinctions
- 3. (:20-26) The Wish that He Could Die Now
 - a. (:20-22) Questioning God's Blessings of Life and Light
 - 1) (:20) Light and Life Do Not Adequately Compensate for Suffering
 - 2) (:21-22) Longing for Death
 - b. (:23-24) Questioning the Paradox of God's Providential Ways
 - 1) (:23) Gives Light of Life but Darkness of Experience
 - 2) (:24) Gives Sustenance but only Sustains My Pain and Suffering
 - c. (:25-26) Reason for His Lament
 - 1) (:25) Realizing His Worst Fears
 - 2) (:26) Restricted to Unrelenting Turmoil

B. (4:1 – 14:22) Cycle #1

- 1. (chs. 4-5) Eliphaz's First Speech – Your Suffering is the Result of Your Sin – Insensitive Counselors Wrongly Apply Their Limited Theology in Hurtful Ways
 - (:1) Prologue – Opening Counsel from Eliphaz
 - a. (4:2-5) Misguided Confrontation
 - 1) (:2) Challenge of Job's Complaining Spirit
 - 2) (:3-4) Commendation for Job's Strengthening of Others
 - 3) (:5) Criticism of Job's Impatience in His Own Case
 - b. (4:6-11) Main Message = Retribution Theology – The Cause and Effect Relationship between Sin and Suffering
 - 1) (:6-7) Argument Summarized
 - a) (:6) General Principle: Godliness Guarantees Prosperity
 - b) (:7) No Exceptions
 - 2) (:8-9) Argument Supported from Observing Agriculture

- 3) (:10-11) Argument Supported from Observing the Animal Kingdom
 - c. (4:12-21) Mystery Revelation –
 - Undermining Job’s Disconnect between His Purity and His Suffering
 - 1) (:12-16) Private Communication
 - a) (:12) Secret Communication
 - b) (:13-14) Scary Communication
 - c) (:15) Spiritual Communication
 - d) (:16) Spoken Communication
 - 2) (:17-21) Pastoral Application
 - a) (:17) Ludicrous Claims to Innocence
 - b) (:18-19) Lessons from the Fallibility of Angels
 - c) (:20-21) Limitations of Mortality
 - d. (5:1-7) Major Danger –
 - Trouble Ahead for Unrepentant Fools
 - 1) (:1) Heaven Turns a Deaf Ear
 - 2) (:2) Anger Kills the Foolish
 - 3) (:3-5) Foolishness Reaps Destruction
 - 4) (:6-7) Mankind Sparks Affliction
 - e. (5:8-16) Majestic Deliverer
 - 1) (:8-9) Appeal to God for Help
 - 2) (:10-11) Only God Can Reverse the Fortunes of the Lowly
 - a) (:10) Sustenance
 - b) (:11) Safety
 - 3) (:12-14) Only God Can Reverse the Fortunes of the Crafty
 - a) (:12) Discourages Them
 - b) (:13) Defeats Them
 - c) (:14) Darkens Them
 - 4) (:15-16) Only God Can Provide Hope for the Helpless
 - f. (5:17-26) Meaningful Discipline
 - 1) (:17-18) Connection between Divine Discipline and Healing
 - 2) (:19-22) Divine Discipline Yields Deliverance from Seven Calamities
 - (:19) Summary
 - a) (:20a) Deliverance from Famine
 - b) (:20b) Deliverance from the Sword
 - c) (:21a) Deliverance from Verbal Attacks
 - d) (:21b) Deliverance from Violence
 - e) (:22a) Deliverance from Violence
 - f) (:22b) Deliverance from Famine
 - g) Deliverance from Wild Beasts
 - 3) (:23-26) Divine Blessing Yields Security and Productivity
 - a) (:23-24) Security
 - b) (:25-26) Productivity
 - (:27) Epilogue – Verified Counsel Needs to Be Heard and Applied
2. (chs. 6-7) Job's First Reply to Eliphaz -- Job Attacks His Counselors and His God – via Lamenting and Complaining about His Undeserved Suffering
 - (:1) Prologue – First Reply of Job
 - a. (6:2-30) Job Attacks His Counselors
 - 1) (:1-13) Lamenting His Hopeless Condition
 - a) (:1-7) Anguish over His Terrible Suffering

- b) (:8-10) Appeal to God for Release from Suffering via Death
 - c) (:11-13) Abandonment to Powerlessness and Hopelessness
 - 2) (6:14-30) Complaining about the Lack of Loyalty from His Friends
 - a) (:14-23) Rebuke for Their Treachery
 - b) (:24-30) Reconsider Your Harsh Position
- b. (7:1-21a) Job Attacks His God
 - 1) (:1-10) Lamenting the Futility of Life
 - a) (:1-3) Futility of Hard Service in Life
 - b) (:4) Futility of Sleeplessness
 - c) (:5) Futility of Physical Affliction
 - d) (:6) Futility of Purposelessness
 - e) (:7-10) Futility of Brevity of Life
 - 2) (:11-21a) Complaining against God's Unending Harassment
 - a) (:11-16) Point of Job's Complaint – Why Can't You Just Let Me Die?
 - b) (:17-21a) Plea for a Reprieve – Why Do You Bother Hassling People?
 - (:21b) Epilogue – Resigned to Death
- 3. (ch. 8) Bildad's First Speech – God's Justice Demands that Sin Be the Issue – The Rigid Traditionalist Remains Rooted in Retribution Theology
 - (:1) Prologue – Bildad's First Speech
 - a. (:2-7) Retribution Theology Offers Job a Path Back to Prosperity
 - 1) (:2-4) Rebuke of Job's Claim of Innocence
 - a) (:2) Your Complaints Lack Substance
 - b) (:3) Your Complaints Attack the Justice of God
 - c) (:4) Your Sons Must Have Sinned for Them to be Killed
 - 2) (:5-7) Repentance Offers Hope of Restoration
 - a) (:5) Seek God's Compassion
 - b) (:6) Straighten Out Your Life
 - c) (:7) Success and Prosperity Will Follow
 - b. (:8-19) Evidence for God's Justice in Retribution Theology
 - 1) (:8-10) Argument from Tradition – The Teaching of the Fathers
 - a) (:8) History Teaches Abiding Lessons
 - b) (:9) Our Stay on Earth is Very Short
 - c) (:10) Wisdom Found in the Lessons of History
 - 2) (:11-19) Argument from Nature – 3 Analogies
 - a) (:11-12) Papyrus Plant Analogy – Withering Proves Lack of Water
 - b) (:13-15) Spider's Web Analogy – False Confidence is Fragile and Inadequate
 - c) (:16-19) Garden Plant Analogy – Inadequate Root System Produces Only Temporary Results
 - c. (:20-22) Conclusion and Application – Retribution Theology Will Yield Future Blessing to the Man of Integrity
 - 1) (:20) God Only Blesses Integrity
 - 2) (:21) God Can Provide Abundant Joy
 - 3) (:22) God Can Shame and Subdue Your Enemies
- 4. (chs. 9-10) Job's First Reply to Bildad – Let Me Alone to Die in Peace – Despair over Inability to Resolve Undeserved Suffering Raises

3 Troubling Fundamental Questions

- (:1) Prologue – Response of Job
- a. (9:2-13) Question #1 – How Can a Man Be Innocent before God?
 - 1) (:2) Key Question – How Can a Man Be Declared Innocent?
 - 2) (:3-4) God Holds Every Advantage in Any Dispute
 - a) (:3) No Refuting God in a Debate
 - b) (:4) No Competing with God's Wisdom, Power and Sovereignty
 - 3) (:5-10) God's Cosmic Activity Manifests His Unsurpassed Power and Majesty
 - 4) (:11-12) God's Transcendence Makes Him Unapproachable
 - 5) (:13) God's Angry Opposition Cannot Be Stopped
- b. (9:14-35) Question #2 – How Can I Answer God in Court?
 - 1) (:14-24) No Possibility of a Fair Hearing Before God
 - a) (:14-19) Interaction Has No Chance of Success
 - b) (:20-24) Innocence Has No Value
 - 2) (:25-35) Impediments to Removing God's Scourge of Undeserved Suffering
 - a) (:25-26) Despair of Positive Resolution Due to Brevity of Life
3 Illustrations of Fleeting Life of Unrelenting Misery
 - b) (:27-28) Positive Thinking Not a Viable Solution –
Can't Escape the Pain
 - c) (:29-31) Pursuit of Holiness Would Be Futile –
Can't Remove the Stench
 - d) (:32-33) Power Disparity But No Mediator –
Can't Connect to God
 - e) (:34-35) Paralyzed by the Dread of God –
Can't Even Express Myself
- c. (10:1-22) Question #3 – Why Was I Even Born to Such a Confusing Existence?
 - 1) (:1-2) Confusion Spurs Bitter Complaining from Job
 - 2) (:3-7) Confusion Raises 3 Questions Regarding God's Judgment of Job
 - a) (:3) Is God Acting Justly?
 - b) (:4) Is God Responding as a Man with Limited Perspective?
 - c) (:5-6) Is God Rushing to Judgment?
 - d) (:7) Conclusion: God's Opposition Doesn't Make Sense
 - 3) (:8-17) Confusion Regarding God's Purpose in Creating Job
 - a) (:8-11) Beauty of Creation
 - b) (:12) Blessing of Providential Preservation
 - c) (:13-17) Bitterness of Present Distress
 - 4) (:18-22) Confusion Cannot be Resolved so Job Desires to Be Left Alone to Die in Peace
 - a) (:18-19) Why Did You Bring Me Out of the Womb?
 - b) (:20-22) Why Can't You Leave Me Alone to Die in Peace?
- 5. (ch. 11) Zophar's First Speech – Misapplying Good Theology –
Suffering Must Indicate Secret Sins that Demand Repentance Because God Knows All
In His Secret Wisdom

- (:1) Prologue
- a. (:2-6) Rebuke of Job for Secret Sins – Babbling without Wisdom
 - 1) (:2-4) Rebuke for False Protestations
 - 2) (:5-6) Rebuke for Resisting God’s Secret Wisdom
- b. (:7-12) Inscrutability of God’s Secret Wisdom
 - 1) (:7-9) God’s Secret Wisdom Cannot be Discovered
 - 2) (:10-12) God’s Secret Wisdom Knows Your Secret Sins
- c. (:13-20) Call for Repentance
 - 1) (:13-16) Methodology of Repentance – How to Repent
 - 2) (:17-20) Motivation for Repentance – Benefits of Repentance
- 6. (chs. 12-14) Job's First Reply to Zophar
 - a. (12:1 – 13:17) Job Complains against His Friends: Worthless Counsel Fails to Plumb the Depths of the Wisdom behind God’s Strange Works
 - (12:1) Prologue
 - 1) (12:2-6) Complaint of Job is Laced with Sarcasm – You Are Disrespecting My Suffering
 - a) (:2-3) Sarcasm Regarding Their Attitude of Superiority
 - b) (:4) Sarcasm Regarding His Humiliation as a Laughingstock
 - c) (:5-6) Sarcasm Regarding the Prosperity and Security of the Wicked
 - 2) (12:7-12) Complaint of Job Mocks Their Simplicity – You Are Spouting Common Knowledge as Brilliant Insight
 - a) (:7-8) Nature Testifies to Your Simplistic Counsel
 - b) (:9-10) Nobody Denies God’s Sovereign Control
 - c) (:11) Naïve Counsel Fails the Discernment Test
 - d) (:12) Novices in Life’s Experiences Have No Insight to Share
 - 3) (12:13-25) Complaint of Job Exposes the Shallowness of Conventional Wisdom – You Don’t Understand God’s Purposes Behind the Deployment of His Wisdom and Power
 - a) (:13) True Wisdom and Power Belong to God
 - b) (:14-15) Thwarting God’s Purposes Is Impossible – His Wisdom and Power Accomplish His Ends
 - c) (:16-22) Turning Powerful People Upside Down is Consistent with God’s Wisdom and Power
 - 1)) (:16) God Acts Indiscriminately Against All People
 - 2)) (:17) God Frustrates Counselors and Judges
 - 3)) (:18) God Undermines the Majesty of Kings
 - 4)) (:19) God Humbles the Priests and the Secure Ones
 - 5)) (:20) God Silences the Trusted Ones and the Elders
 - 6)) (:21) God Vitiates the Nobles and the Strong
 - 7)) (:22) God Brings Enlightenment and Light Out of Darkness
 - d) (:23-25) Transforming Order into Chaos and Destruction is Consistent with God’s Wisdom and Power
 - 4) (13:1-17) Complaint of Job Silences His Critics as He Pivots to Make His Case to God –

You Have Proved to Be Worthless Counselors

- a) (:1-12) Failure of the Counselors
 - 1)) (:1-5) Decision to Turn Away from Worthless Counselors and Argue to God
 - 2)) (:6-9) Defending God with Partiality and Deceit Puts You in Jeopardy
 - 3)) (:10-12) Divine Accountability Will Redress Your Worthless Counsel
- b) (:13-17) Faith of Job in Turning to God
 - 1)) (:13) Faith Shuts Out Worthless Chatter
 - 2)) (:14) Faith Assumes Risks
 - 3)) (:15) Faith Holds on to Hope
 - 4)) (:16) Faith Anticipate Vindication
 - 5)) (:17) Faith Demands a Hearing
- b. (13:18 – 14:22) Wrestling with Painful Realities of Life – Flirting with Hopelessness – The Troublesome Condition of Human Mortality Compounded by Perplexing Divine Opposition Leaves Mankind in Despair with No Relief
 - 1) (13:18-28) Confusion over God's Unexplained Opposition
 - a) (:18-22) Transparency Should Yield Vindication – Not Confusion
 - 1)) (:18-19) Confidence in Ultimate Vindication
 - 2)) (:20-22) Concerns Complicating Open Communication with God
 - b) (:23-28) Tension over God's Strange Opposition
 - 1)) (:23) Make Known My Hidden Sins that are Causing Such Opposition
 - 2)) (:24-25) Mystery Questions Regarding God's Opposition and Man's Precarious Status
 - 3)) (:26-28) My Hardship Has Been Dictated by God
 - 2) (14:1-6) Cynicism over Life's Pervasive Troubles
 - a) (:1-2) Life is Brief and Full of Trouble
 - 1)) (:1) Statement
 - 2)) (:2) Illustrations – Flower and Shadow
 - b) (:3-4) Life is Headed for Divine Judgment with No Human Remedy
 - 1)) (:3) Life is Headed for Divine Judgment
 - 2)) (:4) No Human Remedy
 - c) (:5-6) Life's Duration is Fixed and Life's Troubles Cry Out for Some Relief
 - 1)) (:5) Life's Duration is Fixed by God
 - 2)) (:6) Life's Troubles Cry Out for Some Relief
 - 3) (14:7-12) Contrast between Hope in Nature and Despair for Mankind
 - a) (:7-9) Illustration of the Revived Tree – Hope in Nature
 - b) (:10-12) Illustration of the Unrevived Finality of Human Death – Despair for Mankind
 - 4) (14:13-17) Concerns about Present Pain and Future Possibilities
 - a) (:13) Fatigue over Life's Struggles Desires a Respite from Misery
 - b) (:14-15) Faith Struggles with Questions about Eternity

- c) (:16-17) Future Hiding of Sins Preferred to Present Accountability
- 5) (14:18-22) Cancellation of Hope and Perspective
 - a) (:18-20) Eroding Hope Culminates in Man's Departure
 - b) (:21-22) Escalating Pain Leads to Self-Absorption

C. (15:1 – 21:34) Cycle #2

1. (ch. 15) Eliphaz's Second Speech – Turning Up the Heat –
The Rebuke for Impiety Escalates to a Full-Scale Characterization of
the Demise of the Wicked

- (:1) Prologue
- a. (:2-16) Rebuke for Foolish Impiety -- Serious Charges Leveled Against Job:
 - 1) (:2-3) You Are Puffed Up with Useless Hot Air
 - 2) (:4-6) You Are Irreverent with Crafty Speech
 - 3) (:7-10) You Are Egotistical with Arrogant Claims
 - 4) (:11-13) You Are Angry in Rejecting Godly Counsel
 - 5) (:14-16) You Are Detestable and Corrupt
- b. (:17-35) Reminder of the Dreadful Fate of the Wicked
 - 1) (:17-19) Call for Attention
 - 2) (:20-22) The Wretched State of the Wicked
 - a) (:20) He Lives in Pain for the Fixed Duration of His Life
 - b) (:21) He is Pursued by Terror
 - c) (:22) He Has No Hope of Deliverance
 - 3) (:23-26) The Anxiety and Distress of the Wicked Who Oppose God
 - a) (:23) Anxiety
 - b) (:24) Distress
 - c) (:25-26) Opposition to God
 - 4) (:27-29) The Futility of the Self Indulgence of the Wicked
 - 5) (:30-32) The Inevitability of the Demise of the Wicked
 - 6) (:33-35) Metaphors of the Barrenness of the Wicked

2. (chs. 16-17) Job's Second Reply to Eliphaz – Job's Growing Complaint and Urgent
Appeal to God for Vindication – Despondency Sets In as the Time for Vindication
Evaporates

- (16:1) Prologue – Job Answers His Friends
- a. (16:2-6) Criticism of Job's Counselors for Their Worthless Words –
“You Should Have Been My Comforters”
 - 1) (:2) No Comfort from Job's Comforters
 - 2) (:3) No Value in Windy Words
 - 3) (:4-5) No Comparison if Roles Were Reversed
 - a) (:4a) Imagine Role Reversal – Me Counseling You
 - b) (:4b) Possibility of Attacking Words
 - c) (:5) Probability of Encouraging Words
 - 4) (:6) No Relief in Speech or Silence for Job
- b. (16:7-17) Complaint against God for Adversarial Mistreatment –
“You Should Have Protected Me”
 - 1) (:7-11) Reprehensibly Attacked by Both God and His Evil
Instruments of Destruction
 - a) (:7) Attacks that Have Proved Exhausting and Devastating
 - b) (:8) Accusatory Testimony of My Emaciated Body

- c) (:9) Adversarial Opposition from an Angry God
 - d) (:10) Abused by the Contempt Shown by the Masses
 - e) (:11) Abandoned by God to Harsh Treatment from the Wicked
 - 2) (:12-14) Relentlessly Assaulted by God
 - a) (:12a) Shaken Me By My Neck
 - b) (:12b-13a) Targeted Me with His Arrows
 - c) (:13b) Guttled Me
 - d) (:14) Assaulted Me with Military Tactics
 - 3) (:15-17) Response of Job to Such Adversarial Mistreatment
 - a) (:15-16) Profound Suffering, Mourning and Humiliation
 - b) (:17) Protestations of Innocence
 - c. (16:18-22) Call for Vindication from Heaven – “I Need You to Be My Advocate on High”
 - 1) (:18) Suffering Calls for Vindication
 - 2) (:19) Vindication Can Only Come from Heaven
 - 3) (:20-21) Expected Supporters Have Let Job Down = Failed to Vindicate Him
 - a) (:20a) Let Down by Earthly Friends
 - b) (:20b) Let Down by Heavenly Silence
 - c) (:21) Let Down by Lack of Appeal Process
 - 4) (:22) Vindication is Urgently Needed
 - d. (17:1-5) Charge Leveled against Those Mocking Job and Contributing to His Despondency – “Your Mockery of Me Has Put Your Families in Jeopardy”
 - 1) (:1) Expression of Despondency
 - 2) (:2) Exposure of the Mockers Provoking His Depression
 - 3) (:3) Entreaty for Divine Support
 - 4) (:4) Effects of Divine Blinding on Job’s Mockers – No Exaltation
 - 5) (:5) Expectation of Retribution against Traitorous Friends
 - e. (17:6-10) Condition of Hopelessness as Life Slips Away – “I Am Fading Away as I Maintain My Innocence”
 - 1) (:6) Object of Ridicule and Repulsion
 - 2) (:7) Body of Rapid Physical Deterioration
 - 3) (:8-10) Persistent Claim of Innocence in the Face of Unjustified Attacks
 - f. (17:11-16) Crisis of Hope – “It Looks Like My Only Relief Will Be Found in Sheol”
 - 1) (:11) Calling it Quits
 - 2) (:12) Condemning False Hope When Reality is Darkness
 - 3) (:13-16) Considering Sheol to Be the Destiny that Extinguishes All Hope
3. (ch. 18) Bildad's Second Speech – What the Wicked Should Dread!
 The Destiny of the Wicked Cannot be the Destiny of the Righteous
- (:1) Prologue
 - a. (:2-4) Complaint against Job
 - 1) (:2) Your Words Escalate the Conflict
 - 2) (:3) Your Lack of Respect Demeans Us
 - 3) (:4) Your Inflated View of Your Self-Importance Causes You to Angrily Hurt Yourself

- b. (:5-21) Terrible Fate of the Wicked
 - 1) (:5-7) Degeneration
 - a) (:5-6) Degeneration from Light and Life to Darkness and Death
 - b) (:7) Degeneration from Vigor to Constraint
 - 2) (:8-10) Detention – Snared in a Variety of Traps
 - 3) (:11-14) Dread
 - 4) (:15-17) Desolation
 - 5) (:18-21) Death and Extinction
- 4. (ch. 19) Job's Second Reply to Bildad – Judgment is Coming –
Certainty of Final Vindication Eases the Pain of Present Rejection and Puts False Accusers in Ultimate Jeopardy
 - (:1) Prologue – Response of Job
 - a. (:2-6) Job's Retort
 - 1) (:2-3) Give Me a Break – Ease Up on Your Attacks
 - 2) (:4) My Sin is My Own Business
 - 3) (:5-6) My Suffering Has Been Wrongly Afflicted by God
 - b. (:7-20) Job's Rejection
 - 1) (:7-12) Rejection By God -- Complaint about God's Angry Opposition
 - a) (:7) God Fails to Answer Cries for Help and Justice
 - b) (:8) God Blocks All Possibility of Escape
 - c) (:9) God Strips away Honor
 - d) (:10) God Breaks Me Down and Uproots Hope
 - e) (:11-12) God Angrily Assaults Me as His Enemy
 - 2) (:13-20) Rejection By Family and Society – They Have All Turned against Job
 - a) (:13-14) Failure of Close Relatives and Friends to Help
 - b) (:15-16) Failure of Household Servants to Help
 - c) (:17-19) Failure of Close Relatives and Friends to Help
 - d) (:20) Summary: Barely Clinging to Life
 - c. (:21-27) Job's Redeemer
 - 1) (:21-22) Give Me a Break = Need for a Redeemer
 - a) (:21) Plea for Pity
 - b) (:22) Perplexed by Persecution
 - 2) (:23-24) Engrave My Words = Expectation of a Redeemer
 - 3) (:25-27) Note My Confidence in My Redeemer
 - a) (:25) Final Resolution
 - b) (:26-27) Visual Encounter
 - (:28-29) Epilogue – Reversal of Punishment
 - 1) (:28) Pursuing Unjust Opposition against Job
 - 2) (:29) Warning of Judgment to Come
- 5. (ch. 20) Zophar's Second Speech – The Portion of the Wicked Man –
The Horrible Fate of the Wicked, While True, Bears No Application to the Righteous in Their Suffering
 - (:1) Prologue – Response of Zophar
 - a. (:2-3) The Hackneyed Feedback of Zophar – Driven to Respond
 - 1) Driven to Respond by Troubling Thoughts
 - 2) Driven to Respond by Inward Agitation
 - 2a) Driven to Respond by Insulting Attacks

- 1a) Driven to Respond by a Desire to Impart Wisdom
- b. (:4-29) The Horrible Fate of the Wicked
 - 1) (:4-11) Momentary Triumph (High Visibility) Trumped by Permanent Disappearance
 - a) (:4-5) Triumph is Fleeting
 - b) (:6-9) Memory is Forgotten
 - c) (:10) Reparations Impoverish His Sons
 - d) (:11) Vitality is Viscerated
 - 2) (:12-23) Momentary Enjoyment Trumped by Poisonous Consequences
 - a) (:12-16) Deceptive Sweetness of Wickedness
 - b) (:17) Denial of the Fundamental Good Things in Life
 - c) (:18-19) Deeds of Oppression Bring No Lasting Joy
 - d) (:20-23) Disappointment of a Frustrated Life that Will Suffer God's Wrath
 - 3) (:24-28) Mandatory Destruction that Proves Terrifying and Inescapable
 - a) (:24-25a) Bitterness of Penetrating Attack
 - b) (:25b-26) Terror of Certain Destruction
 - c) (:27-28) Despair of Complete Defeat
- (:29) Summary Thesis
- 6. (ch. 21) Job's Second Reply to Zophar – The Observable Prosperity of the Wicked Refutes the Rigid Application of the Doctrine of Retribution
 - (:1) Prologue – Job Replies to Zophar
 - a. (:2-6) Appeal for a Sympathetic Hearing
 - 1) (:2-3) Listen Up
 - 2) (:4-5) Look at Me
 - 3) (:6) Lament My Shocking Condition
 - b. (:7-34) Arguments Refuting the Rigid Application of Retribution
 - 1) (:7-16) The Wicked Obviously Can Prosper
 - a) (:7) Wicked People Can Live Long and Powerful Lives
 - b) (:8-13) Wicked People Can Enjoy Many Observable Blessings
 - c) (:14-15) Wicked People Openly Reject God
 - d) (:16) Wicked People, Despite Their Prosperity, Have Nothing to Offer
 - 2) (:17-21) The Wicked Can Escape Judgment in This Life
 - a) (:17-18) Counter Examples to the Doctrine of Retribution
 - b) (:19-21) Contradiction of the Theory that God Visits the Judgment on the Sons
 - (:22) Aside – Exercise Caution in Presuming to Understand God's Justice
 - 3) (:23-34) The Wicked Cannot be Limited to a Rigid Application of the Doctrine of Retribution
 - a) (:23-26) Death Treats All Individuals the Same – Regardless of Fortunes in Life
 - b) (:27-33) No Denying the Counter Examples of the Prosperity of the Wicked
 - c) (:34) Mike Drop = Counsel of the Mockers Has Been Refuted

D. (22:1 – 26:14) Cycle #3

1. (ch. 22) Eliphaz's Third Speech – Turn and Be Restored –

Call to Repentance to Experience the Power of a Restored Relationship with God

(:1) Prologue – Response of Eliphaz

a. (:2-11) Suffering Is Deserved Because of Social Sins

1) (:2-5) Labeling Job a Great Sinner

a) (:2-3) Human Behavior Can't Benefit God

b) (:4-5) Great Judgment Must Be in Response to Great Wickedness

2) (:6-9) Leveling Specific Charges against Job = Social Sins

a) (:6) Financial Exploitation

b) (:7) Failure to Show Compassion to the Afflicted

(:8) Aside: You Have Failed to Act as a Powerful and Honorable Man

c) (:9) Failure to Care for Widows and Orphans

3) (:10-11) Listing Consequences of Divine Judgment = Job's Suffering

a) (:10a) Trapped

b) (:10b) Terrified

c) (:11a) Blinded

d) (:11b) Overwhelmed

b. (:12-20) Divine Judgment Always Targets the Wicked

1) (:12-14) Don't Question God's Concern for Moral Behavior

a) (:12) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Care

b) (:13) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Know or See

c) (:14) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Stay Involved

2) (:15-17) Don't Follow in the Footsteps of Wicked Men in the Past

a) (:15-16) Remember the Catastrophic Judgments on the Wicked in the Past

b) (:17) Remember the Arrogant Independent Spirit of the Wicked

3) (:18-20) Don't End Up Being Mocked by the Righteous as You Are Judged

a) (:18) Retribution Theology

b) (:19-20) Righteous Gloating over the Destruction of the Wicked

c. (:21-30) Repentance Yields the Power of a Restored Relationship

1) (:21-25) Process of Repentance Yields Abundant Blessing

a) (:21) Relinquish Rebellious Spirit (Submit) and Make Peace with God

b) (:22) Receive Instruction and Apply God's Word

c) (:23a) Return to God and Be Restored

d) (:23b-25) Remove Sin and Pursue God

2) (:26-30) Power of a Restored Relationship

a) (:26) Power of Delighting in God

b) (:27) Power of Prayer and Thanksgiving

- c) (:28) Power of Guidance and Accomplishment
- d) (:29) Power of Personal Deliverance
- e) (:30) Power of Intercession to Deliver Others

2. (chs. 23-24) Job's Third Reply to Eliphaz

a. (23:1-17) The Tension of Faith -- Confidence in Personal Integrity Fortifies Faith in God's Sovereign Working Despite the Frustration of Perplexing Suffering

(:1) Prologue – Job Replies Once Again

1) (:2-7) My Case Deserves a Fair Hearing before God

a) (:2) My Complaints Are Not Making Any Difference

1)) My Complaints Are Criticized as Rebellion

2)) My Complaints Are Legitimate Due to Severe Suffering

b) (:3-5) My Compulsion Is to Plead My Case in Person

1)) (:3) Longing to Find and Approach God

2)) (:4) Longing to Present My Case

3)) (:5) Longing to Interact with God's Responses

c) (:6-7) My Confidence Is that the Resolution Would Turn Out Positive

1)) (:6) God Would Not Misuse His Power to Dominate Me

2)) (:7) God Would Listen to Reason and Deliver Me

2) (:8-12) My Attitude Fluctuates between Frustration and Confidence

a) (:8-9) Attitude of Frustration -- God Remains Hidden so Pleading My Case Is Impossible

1)) (:8) Cannot Find Him in Front or Behind

2)) (:9) Cannot Find Him on the Left or the Right

b) (:10) Attitude of Confidence -- My Character and Conduct Will Receive the Gold Seal of Divine Approval

1)) My Conduct and Suffering Are Fully Known to God

2)) My Character and Conduct Will Ultimately Be Vindicated

c) (:11-12) Personal Testimony of Faith and Obedience

1)) (:11) Testimony of Obeying God's Ways

2)) (:12) Testimony of Treasuring God's Word

3) (:13-17) My Fear Is that God Can Do Whatever He Pleases

a) (:13) God Is Uniquely Sovereign

b) (:14) God Performs His Plans for Me

c) (:15-17) God Scares Me Because He Might Choose to Afflict Me to Death

1)) (:15) Terrified by God Presence

2)) (:16) Dismayed by God's Appointed Afflictions

3)) (:17) Not Silenced in the Face of Imminent Death

b. (24:1-25) Proof that the Doctrine of Retribution Cannot Be Rigidly Applied – Don't Deny that God Afflicts the Righteous Since We Can See that God Allows the Wicked to Prosper for Now

(:1) Prologue – Job's Conundrum – Why Does God Not Administer Justice on a Consistent and Timely Basis?

- 1) (2-17) Job's Complaint over God's Failure to Administer Justice on a Consistent and Timely Basis
 - a) (:2-12) God Seems Indifferent to Blatant Crimes =
The Property Crimes and Social Crimes that Target the Poor and Vulnerable
 - 1)) (:2-4) Delineation of Property and Social Crimes
 - 2)) (:5-8) Description of the Suffering of the Poor and Needy
 - 3)) (:9-11) Deprivation of the Poor and Needy
 - 4)) (:12) Divine Indifference?
 - b) (:13-17) God Seems Indifferent to Secret Crimes =
The Deeds of Darkness Committed by Criminals
 - 1)) (:13) Preference for Darkness over Light
 - 2)) (:14-16) Three Categories of Criminals Who Operate in the Darkness
 - 3)) (:17) Preference for Darkness over Light
- 2) (:18-24) Job's Certainty Regarding the Eventual Punishment of the Wicked
 - a) (:18-20) The Destiny of the Wicked Is Cursed
 - 1)) (:18) Regarded as Insignificant, Cursed and Unsatisfied
 - 2)) (:19) Reduced to Nothing Like the Melting Snow
 - 3)) (:20) Remembered No More
 - b) (:21-22) The Crimes of the Wicked Persist for Now
 - 1)) (:21) Mistreating the Vulnerable
 - 2)) (:22) Manhandling the Valiant
 - c) (:23-24) The Prosperity of the Wicked Is Only Temporary
 - 1)) (:23) Temporary Security before Final Judgment
 - 2)) (:24) Temporary Exaltation before Final Judgment
- (:25) Epilogue – Job's Challenge = Prove Me Wrong
3. (ch. 25) Bildad's Third Speech – Maggot Theology = Insignificant Man Should Forget about seeking Vindication and Purity from the Majestic God Who Reigns Above
 - (:1) Prologue – Response of Bildad
 - a. (:2-3) The Majestic God Reigns Above
 - 1) (:2) Establishes Peace While Exercising Dominion
 - a) Exercises Dominion
 - b) Establishes Peace
 - 2) (:3) Enlightens All While Commanding Innumerable Forces
 - a) Commands Innumerable Forces
 - b) Enlightens All
 - b. (:4) Vindication and Purity Cannot Be Attained by Sinful Man
 - 1) No Possibility of Vindication before God
 - 2) No Possibility of Purity before God
 - c. (:5-6) Man Is Far Less Significant than the Moon and Stars Which Have No Brightness or Purity before God
 - 1) (:5) Moon and Stars Pale before God's Glorious Presence
 - 2) (:6) Man's Standing Compared to Lowly Maggots and Worms
4. (ch. 26) Job's Third Reply to Bildad – Your Counsel Is Worthless –
Worthless Counsel Fails to Draw Out Relevant Applications from the Awesome Power of

the Majestic God

- (:1) Prologue – Job Responds
- a. (:2-4) Sarcastically Mocking the Worthless Counsel of Bildad --
3 Characterizations of Worthless Counsel
 - 1) (:2) Powerless to Help the Weak
 - 2) (:3) Devoid of Helpful Wisdom or Insight
 - 3) (:4) Lacks Divine Authority
- b. (:5-14) Sincerely Praising the Majestic Power of God
 - 1) (:5-6) Power over the Realm of the Dead
 - 2) (:7-10) Power over Creation as God Exercises Control
 - a) (:7) Control over All Creation = Summary Statement
 - b) (:8) Control over the Clouds
 - c) (:9) Control over the Display of His Glory
 - d) (:10) Control over the Separation of Light and Darkness
 - 3) (:11-13) Power over Chaotic Cosmic Forces
 - a) (:11) Over the Pillars of Heaven
 - b) (:12-13) Over the Sea, the Heavens and All Mythical Foes
 - 4) (:14) Power Beyond Our Imagination

E. (27:1 – 31:40) Final Defense of Job

1. (27:1-23) Job's First Monologue – Job Reaffirms His Righteous Integrity, the Vanity of Hypocrisy and the Doomed Destiny of the Wicked – 3 Reaffirmations

- (:1) Prologue – Job's First Monologue
- a. (:2-6) Continuing to Claim Righteous Integrity
 - 1) (:2-4) Integrity Confirmed by an Unwavering Oath
 - a) (:2) Appeal to the Very God Who Has Sovereignly Afflicted Him
 - b) (:3) Attribution of His Life to God's Preservation
 - c) (:4) Avoidance of Any Impropropriety or Deceit
 - 2) (:5-6) Integrity Clutched Tightly until Death
- b. (:7-12) Cursing and Counseling Hypocrites
 - 1) (:7-10) Cursing His Enemies
 - a) (:7) Imprecation
 - b) (:8-10) Inconsistencies of Hypocrites Exposed – Their Hope is Vain
 - 2) (:11-12) Counseling His Counselors
 - a) (:11) Instruction
 - b) (:12) I Inconsistencies of His Counselors Exposed – Their Arguments Contradict Reality
- c. (:13-23) Calling Out the Doomed Destiny of the Wicked
 - (:13) Introduction
 - 1) (:14-15) Doomed Family Destiny
 - a) (:14) Sons and Descendants
 - b) (:15) Survivors and Their Widows
 - 2) (:16-17) Doomed Material Treasures
 - 3) (:18-23) Doomed Dwellings of False Safety and Security
 - a) (:18-19) Rapid Reversal of Fortune
 - b) (:20-22) Impossibility of Escape
 - c) (:23) Object of Derision

2. (28:1-28) Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

Wisdom Can Only Be Found in Communion with God by Divine Revelation as We Fear Him and Turn away from Evil

(:1-2) Introduction – All Treasure Needs to Be Mined

a. (:3-11) Mining for Treasure Requires Impressive Effort –
But Still Wisdom Cannot be Mined

- 1) (:3-4) Mining Efforts Go to Great Lengths
- 2) (:5-6) Mining Efforts Yield Valuable Resources
- 3) (:7-8) Mining Efforts Surpass the Most Impressive Prowess of Birds and Beasts
- 4) (:9-11) Mining Efforts Achieve Seismic Upheavals in Unearthing Hidden Treasures

(:12) Refrain = Wisdom is Elusive

b. (:13-19) Wisdom Cannot be Purchased Because It Is Priceless as the Highest Valued Treasure

- 1) (:13-14) Wisdom Cannot Be Properly Valued or Found by Man
- 2) (:15-19) Wisdom is Priceless Compared to the Highest Valued Treasures

(:20) Refrain = Wisdom is Elusive

c. (:21-27) Only God Understands and Dispenses Wisdom

- 1) (:21-22) Wisdom Is Concealed from the Living and the Dead
- 2) (:23-24) Wisdom Is Only Discoverable and Known by God
- 3) (:25-27) Wisdom Is Only Employed and Dispensed by God

(:28) Conclusion – The Essence of Wisdom Revealed

3. (ch. 29-31) Job's Second Monologue

a. (29:1-25) Focus on the Past – Longing for the Good Old Times –
Past Blessings Inspire Wistful Reflections

(:1) Prologue –

1) (:2-6) Past Blessings

- a) (:2) God's Providential Care
- b) (:3) God's Guiding Illumination
- c) (:4-5) God's Intimate Friendship
- d) (:6) God's Abundant Provision

2) (:7-10) Past Respect

- a) (:7) Daily Routine Involved Prominent Status
- b) (:8-10) Deferential Response Involved Honor and Respect
 - 1)) (:8) Response of All Ages – Young and Old
 - 2)) (:9-10) Response of the Elite -- Princes and Key Officials

3) (:11-17) Pursuit of Justice and Righteousness for the Vulnerable

- a) (:11-14) Protecting the Vulnerable
 - 1)) (:11-12) Receiving Accolades for Protecting the Vulnerable
 - 2)) (:13) Reviving Blessing and Joy to the Vulnerable
 - 3)) (:14) Rendering Decisions in Justice and Righteousness
- b) (:15-17) Delivering the Vulnerable
 - 1)) (:15) Delivering the Severely Handicapped
 - 2)) (:16a) Dispensing Loving Care to the Needy

- 3)) (:16b) Diligently Investigating Tough Cases to Deliver the Right Verdict
 - 4)) (:17a) Destroying the Power of the Oppressors
 - 5)) (:17b) Delivering Vulnerable Prey
- 4) (:18-20) Expectation of a Long and Vigorous Life – 3 Analogies
 - a) (:18) Sand Analogy
 - b) (:19) Tree Analogy
 - c) (:20) Warrior and Hunter Analogy
- 5) (:21-25) Respected Leadership Role
 - a) (21-23) Leadership Role in Providing Helpful Counsel
 - b) (:24) Leadership Role in Providing Emotional Encouragement
 - c) (:25) Summary of Respected Leadership Role
- b. (30:1-31) Focus on the Present – Lamenting the Depths of Shame and Suffering – Unjust Suffering and Derisive Social Attacks Unleash Physical, Emotional, Psychological and Spiritual Agony When God Remains Silent
 - 1) (:1-15) Assaulted by Contemptible Mockers
 - a) (:1-8) Ridiculed by the Dregs of Society
 - 1)) (:1) Contemptible by Virtue of Their Youth and Lowly Status
 - 2)) (:2-8) Contemptible by Virtue of Their Despicable Characteristics
 - b) (:9-15) Rebuffed by Their Unrestrained Taunts and Attacks
 - 1)) (:9-10) Unrestrained Taunts
 - 2)) (:11-14) Unrestrained Attacks
 - 3)) (:15) Unrestrained Terrors
 - 2) (:16-23) Afflicted by Unresponsive God
 - a) (:16-19) Unrelieved Agony While Afflicted by God
 - 1)) (:16-17) Agony of Job
 - 2)) (:18-19) Afflicted by God
 - b) (:20-23) Unanswered Appeal While Afflicted by God
 - 1)) (:20) Appeal of Job
 - 2)) (:21-23) Afflicted by God
 - 3) (:24-31) Agonized over Unjust Suffering
 - a) (:24-25) Agony of Being Denied Deliverance after Helping Others
 - 1)) (:24) Personal Cry for Help
 - 2)) (:25) Practical Compassion Displayed towards the Afflicted
 - b) (:26) Agony of Frustrated Expectations
 - c) (:27-30) Agony of Intense Suffering and Lonely Mourning
 - d) (:31) Agony of Funeral Dirge
- c. (31:1-40) Focus on the Future – Oath of Innocence – Even Job’s Dramatic Oath of Innocence Cannot Force God to Break His Silence and Address Job’s Unjust Suffering
 - 1) (:1-34) Top 10 List of Avoided Sins
 - a) (:1-4) Lust
 - b) (:5-6) Falsehood
 - c) (:7-8) Covetousness

- d) (:9-12) Adultery
- e) (:13-15) Oppression -- Mistreatment of Servants
- f) (:16-23) Neglect for the Needy
- g) (:24-28) Idolatry
- h) (:29-30) Vindictiveness
- i) (:31-32) Withholding Hospitality
- j) (:33-34) Hypocrisy -- Concealment of Sin
- 2) (:35-37) Confidence in Innocence Demands a Divine Hearing and Response
 - a) (:35a) Demanding a Response from God
 - 1)) Calling for a Hearing
 - 2)) Confirming His Testimony
 - 3)) Calling for a Response
 - b) (:35b-36a) Transparency and Boldness before the Community
 - c) (:37) Transparency and Boldness in Approaching God
- 3) (:38-40a) Postscript – Final Sin of Abuse of the Land
- (:40b) Epilogue – Case Closed

II. (32:1 – 37:24) ELIHU’S SPEECHES – THEOLOGICAL BRIDGE – ENHANCED PERSPECTIVE ON SUFFERING

A. (32:1-22) Elihu’s Introduction: Impassioned and Impelled to Speak – The Burden for Imparting Wisdom Falls on Those Truly Inspired by God Regardless of Age or Experience

- 1. (:1-5) Impassioned by Anger and Impatient to Speak
 - a. (:1) Occasion for the Display of Elihu’s Anger
 - b. (:2-3) Objects of Elihu’s Anger
 - 1) (:2) Anger against Job
 - 2) (:3) Anger against Job’s Three Counsellors
 - c. (:4) Outburst of Elihu’s Anger
 - d. (:5) Origin and Obsession of Elihu’s Anger
- 2. (:6-22) Impelled to Speak – 4 Motivations
 - a. (:6-10) Impelled to Speak Due to the Possession of Wisdom
 - 1) (:6-7) Initial Deference Given to the Older Counsellors
 - 2) (:8) Inspiration from God is the Key Qualifier for Wisdom
 - 3) (:9) Inability of Age to Guarantee Wisdom
 - 4) (:10) Introduction of New Counsel that Merits a Hearing
 - b. (:11-14) Impelled to Speak Due to the Inadequacy of Earlier Arguments
 - 1) (:11-12) Earlier Arguments Failed to Refute Job
 - 2) (:13-14) Elihu Not Defeated Because He Offers New Arguments
 - c. (:15-20) Impelled to Speak Due to His Pent Up Words
 - 1) (:15-17) The Other Counsellors Are Out of Words
 - 2) (:18-20) Elihu is Full of Words and Bursting at the Seams to Speak
 - d. (:21-22) Impelled to Speak Due to His Impartiality and Objectivity

B. (33:1-33) Elihu’s First Speech: God Does Speak – But in Unexpected Ways – God Uses Dreams, Pain and Mediation to Communicate How One Can Avoid the Tragic Consequences of Sin and Enjoy His Grace

- (:1-7) Elihu’s Pleading for a Hearing – Receive My Words and Respect My Arguments

- a. (:1-3) Receive My Words as Sincere Wisdom
 - 1) (:1) My Words Deserve a Hearing
 - 2) (:2) My Words Are Ready to Be Spoken
 - 3) (:3) My Words Are Sincere
 - b. (:4-7) Respect My Arguments as Inspired and Not Intimidating
 - 1) (:4) My Arguments Are Inspired
 - 2) (:5) My Arguments Must Be Addressed
 - 3) (:6-7) My Arguments Are Not Intended to Intimidate
- 1. (:8-12) Transcendence of God = Starting Point for Elihu
 - a. (:8) Job's Case Reviewed by Elihu
 - b. (:9) Job's Claim of Innocence
 - c. (:10-11) Job's Complaint of Divine Opposition
 - d. (:12) Conclusion of Elihu – Apply the Doctrine of God's Transcendence
- 2. (:13-14) Thesis – God Communicates in a Variety of Ways that Man Might Miss
 - a. (:13) Restating Job's Complaint = God Is Not Responsive
 - b. (:14) Refuting Job's Complaint
- 3. (:15-30) Three Methods of Divine Communication
 - a. (:15-18) God Speaks in Dreams
 - 1) (:15-16) Manner of Communication
 - 2) (:17-18) Purpose of Communication
 - b. (:19-22) God Speaks in Pain and Sickness
 - 1) (:19) Manner of Communication
 - 2) (:20-22) Purpose of Communication
 - c. (:23-30) God Speaks via a Mediating Angel
 - 1) (:23) Manner of Communication
 - 2) (:24-26) Purpose of Communication
 - 3) (:27-28) Testimony to God's Grace in Redemption
 - d. (:29-30) Summary Purpose Statement – To Rescue and Revive
- (:31-33) Elihu's Closing Appeal
 - a. (:31) Listen
 - b. (:32) Speak
 - c. (:33) Learn

C. (34:1-37) Elihu's Second Speech: Defense of God's Justice –

Both the Character and Governance of God Refute Any Charge of Injustice

- (:1-4) Prologue – Elihu's Second Speech
- (:2-4) Call for Discernment
 - a. (:2) Listen to Me
 - b. (:3) Exercise Discernment
 - c. (:4) Choose What is Right and Good
- 1. (:5-9) Elihu's Mischaracterization of Job's Attack against God's Justice
 - a. (:5) Job's Complaint against God
 - b. (:6) Job's Incurable Wound Despite His Integrity
 - c. (:7-8) Job's Condemnation by Elihu
 - 1) (:7) Worthy of Derision
 - 2) (:8) Walks with the Wicked
 - d. (:9) Job's Outrageous Conclusion Mischaracterized by Elihu
- 2. (:10-30) Elihu's Defense of God's Justice
 - a. (:10-15) Impossible for God to Pervert Justice

- (:10a) Appeal for Discernment
 - 1) (:10b-12) Based on General Principle
 - 2) (:13-15) Based on God's Independent and Transcendent Governance
 - b. (:16-30) Implementation of Justice = Essence of Governance
 - (:16) Appeal for Discernment
 - 1) (:17-20) Disregard for Justice Out of the Question
 - 2) (:21-30) Demonstration of Justice Apparent to All
- 3. (:31-37) Personal Polemic against Job
 - a. (:31-33) Call for Job to Repent
 - 1) (:31) Respond to Divine Discipline
 - 2) (:32) Reveal to Me Secret Sins
 - 3) (:33) Render Your Decision
 - b. (:34-37) Condemnation of Job for Rebellion
 - 1) (:34-35) Demonstrates a Lack of Wisdom
 - 2) (:36-37) Demonstrates a Spirit of Rebellion

D. (35:1-16) Elihu's Third Speech: Waiting for God When He Is Silent – Defending the Justice of God Involves Wrestling with Difficult Questions

- (:1) Prologue – Elihu's Third Speech
- 1. (:2-8) Question #1 – What Is the Point of Being Good?
 - a. (:2-4) Is It Inconsistent to Demand Vindication from a God Whose Justice You Challenge?
 - 1) (:2) Who Determines What is Right?
 - 2) (:3) What Does It Profit You to Do Good?
 - 3) (:4) Elihu Attempts to Answer
 - b. (:5-8) Are You Asking the Right Questions?
 - 1) (:5) How Can You Figure Out Why the Transcendent God Is Treating You This Way?
 - 2) (:6-7) How Does Your Behavior Impact God?
 - 3) (:8) How Does Your Behavior Impact Others?
- 2. (:9-16) Question #2 – Why Is There No Answer from God?
 - a. (:9-12) What Are the Motivations of People Crying Out to God for Help?
 - 1) (:9) Does Oppression Require a Response from God?
 - 2) (:10-11) Are People Truly Seeking God for Who He Is?
 - 3) (:12) Are People Approaching God in Humility or in Pride?
 - b. (:13-16) How Should You Respond When God Is Silent?
 - 1) (:13-14) Is Something Wrong with Your Approach to God?
 - 2) (:15-16) Are You Lashing Out with Verbal Retorts?

E. (36:1 – 37:24) Elihu's Fourth Speech: Not WHY Do You Suffer -- But WHAT Can You Learn – God's Power and Wisdom as Displayed in Nature Reinforce His Justice and Use of Affliction for Discipline to Recover the Wayward Righteous

- (36:1) Prologue – Elihu's Fourth Speech
- (36:2-4) Introduction – The Credibility of the Speaker
 - a. (:2) Speaking on Behalf of God
 - b. (:3) Speaking in Inspired Support of God in Defense of His Justice
 - c. (:4) Speaking in Sincerity and Truth with Absolute Knowledge
- 1. (36:5-25) The Justice of God Disciplines the Wayward Righteous via Affliction to Attempt to Recover Them

- a. (:5-7) The Power of God Enforces Divine Justice
 - 1) (:5) God's Power in Justice Does Not Compromise God's Compassion
 - 2) (:6) God's Power in Justice Terminates the Wicked But Delivers the Afflicted
 - 3) (:7) God's Power in Justice Can Elevate the Righteous to Positions of Authority (Transform Their Circumstances)
 - b. (:8-12) Divine Justice Afflicts the Wayward Righteous for a Purpose
 - 1) (:8-9) Fall of the Righteous into Affliction Due to Transgressions
 - 2) (:10-12) Fate of the Fallen Righteous
 - c. (:13-15) The Contrast between the Fate of the Unrepentant Wicked and the Wayward Righteous Who Listen and Repent
 - 1) (:13-14) The Fate of the Unrepentant Wicked
 - 2) (:15) The Fate of the Wayward Righteous Who Listen and Repent
 - d. (:16-21) Danger Zone – Warning to the Wayward Righteous to Repent
 - 1) (:16) Danger of Rejecting Opportunities for Deliverance
 - 2) (:17) Danger of Divine Judgment Multiplying
 - 3) (:18-19) Danger of Prosperity Preventing Repentance
 - 4) (:20) Danger of Viewing Death as an Escape
 - 5) (:21) Danger of Continuing Down the Wrong Road
 - e. (:22-25) Celebration of God's Supremacy as He Exercises Power and Wisdom in Discipline
 - 1) (:22a) Supremacy of the Power of God
 - 2) (:22b-23) Supremacy of the Wisdom of God
 - 3) (:24-25) Application: Extol God's Awesome Works (His Power and Wisdom) Rather than Challenging His Justice and Discipline
- (36:26) Transition – Exaltation of the Inscrutable Eternal God of Wisdom
2. (36:27 – 37:20) God's Greatness, Power and Wisdom Reflected in Nature for Man to Contemplate
- a. (36:27 – 37:5) See God in the Awesome Thunderstorm
 - 1) (36:27-33) Demonstration of Control and Wisdom
 - 2) (37:1-5) Demonstration of Majesty and Power
 - b. (37:6-13) See God in Control of Chaotic Forces of Nature
 - 1) (:6-8) Directing the Forces of Snow and Rain
 - 2) (:9-13) Directing the Forces of Powerful Storms
 - c. (37:14-20) Contemplate the Wonders of God in Nature and Make Application
 - 1) (:14-18) Asking the Tough Meteorological Questions to Humble Job
 - 2) (:19-20) Applying the Wonders of God in Nature to Quell Any Disputes
- (37:21-24) Epilogue – The Divine Splendor
- a. (:21) Blinding Brilliance of God
 - b. (:22) Awesome Majesty of God
 - c. (:23) Exalted Power and Justice of God
 - d. (:24) Response of Fear and Humility

III. (38:1 – 42:6) DIVINE RECKONING OF INSCRUTABLE SOVEREIGNTY

A. (38:1 – 40:2) First Interrogation of Job Regarding God's Created Order – God's Awesome Design and Providential Control of the Universe and All that Is in It Should Cause Us to Humbly Submit

- (38:1) Prologue – The Lord Answers Job
- (38:2-3) Opening Challenge and Rebuke – Putting Job in His Place
 - a. (:2) You Have a Limited Perspective
 - b. (:3) You Should Not Be Trying to Correct God
- 1. (38:4-15) Interrogation Regarding Creation
 - a. (:4-7) Creation of the Earth
 - b. (:8-11) Creation of the Sea
 - c. (:12-15) Creation of Dawn
- 2. (38:16-38) Interrogation Regarding Control over the Inanimate World
 - a. (:16-18) Unseen Netherworld (Depths and Expanses) = Gates of Death
 - b. (:19-21) Mystery of Light and Darkness
 - c. (:22-24) Storehouses of Snow and Hail
 - d. (:25-27) Storm
 - e. (:28-30) Variety of Forms of Moisture
 - f. (:31-33) Heavenly Constellations
 - g. (:34-38) Meteorological Phenomena
- 3. (38:39 – 39:30) Interrogation Regarding Control over the Animate World
 - a. (38:39-41) Nourishment Provided for Lions and Ravens
 - b. (39:1-4) Gestation and Birthing Practices of Mountain Goats and Deer
 - c. (39:5-8) Freedom of the Wild Donkey
 - d. (39:9-12) Strength of the Wild Ox
 - e. (39:13-18) Strange and Weird Ostrich
 - f. (39:19-25) The Fearsome Warhorse
 - g. (39:26-30) Flight of the Predator Bird
- (40:1-2) Closing Challenge and Rebuke – Will You Now Submit?

B. (40:3-5) Job's First Reply – Job Humbled and Silenced – Confronted with His Relative Smallness, Job Is Humbled and Silenced

- (:3) Prologue – Job's First Reply
- 1. (:4) Job Is Silenced in Light of His Relative Smallness
- 2. (:5) Job Offers No More Challenges to God's Justice

C. (40:6 – 41:34) Second Interrogation of Job – Who Is Calling the Shots in God's Moral Universe? Only the Creator and Controller of the Most Powerful and Impressive Creatures Can Determine What Is Just in Overall World Governance

- (40:6) Prologue: Second Set of Questions Issued by the Lord
- 1. (40:7-14) Challenging Questions to Put Job in His Place
 - a. (:7-9) Can You Really Step Up to the Plate?
 - 1) (:7) Next Round of Interrogation
 - 2) (:8) Who Sets the Standard for Justice?
 - 3) (:9) Who Demonstrates Ultimate Power and Authority?
 - b. (:10-14) Take Your Best Shot
 - 1) (:10) Look the Part of the Master of the Universe
 - 2) (:11-13) Act the Part
 - 3) (:14) Earn Your Respect by Proving Your Sovereignty

2. (40:15 – 41:34) Reflecting on God's Creation and Control of the Ultimate Land and Sea Creatures – Behemoth and Leviathan

- a. (40:15-24) Impressive Behemoth - The Ultimate Land Creature
 - 1) (:15) Impressive Creature Overall
 - 2) (:16-18) Impressive Physical Strength
 - 3) (:19-22) Impressive Preeminence
 - 4) (:23-24) Impressive Power to Neutralize Any Threat
- b. (41:1-34) Impressive Leviathan – The Ultimate Sea Creature
 - 1) (:1-11) Impossibility of Capturing and Controlling It
 - 2) (:12-24) Impressive Physical Characteristics
 - 3) (:25-32) Impressive Physical Movement that Endangers Others
 - 4) (:33-34) Summary of Supremacy and Dominion

D. (42:1-6) Job Responds in Humble Repentance – An Appreciation of God's Person and Sovereign Working in Our Lives (His Power and His Wisdom) Removes All Presumption and Pride

- (:1) Prologue
- 1. (:2) Confession of Divine Sovereignty – Two Components
 - a. Confession of God's Power
 - b. Confession of God's Wisdom
- 2. (:3) Confession of Human Presumption and Pride
 - a. (:3a) Pride
 - b. (:3b) Presumption
- 3. (:4-6) Repentance that Humbles Oneself in Submission before God
 - a. (:4) Desire for Divine Instruction
 - b. (:5) Delight in Renewed Vision of God
 - c. (:6) Despising All Pride and Presumption

(42:7-17) EPILOGUE – HAPPY RESOLUTION OF DIVINE BLESSING – THE OUTCOME – JOB VINDICATED AND RESTORED

(:7a) Prologue

A. (42:7b-9) Job Vindicated – Yahweh's Verdict

- 1. (:7b) God Rebukes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar
- 2. (:8) Intercession of Job
 - a. Burnt Offering Commanded
 - b. Intercessory Prayer Offered
 - c. Divine Acceptance Promised
- 3. (:9) Obedience and Divine Acceptance
 - a. Obedience Fulfilled
 - b. Divine Acceptance Extended

B. (42:10-17) Job Restored – God Restores Job's Fortune, Family and Fullness of Life

- 1. (:10-12) Restoration of Job's Fortune
 - a. (:10) Gracious Doubling of Prosperity
 - b. (:11) Family Encouragement and Enrichment
 - c. (:12) Extensive Possessions – Doubling Up in Each Category
- 2. (:13-15) Restoration of Job's Family
 - a. (:13) Quiver Restocked

- b. (:14) Pleasant Names
 - c. (:15) Privileged Daughters
- 3. (:16-17) Restoration of Job's Fullness of life
 - a. (:16a) Long Life
 - b. (:16b) Extensive Progeny
 - c. (:17) Fulfilled Life

TEXT: Job 1:1-5

TITLE: JOB'S PIETY, PROSPERITY AND PRIESTLY PRECAUTION

BIG IDEA:

THE HERO OF THE STORY IS INTRODUCED AS A GODLY MAN OF UNRIVALED INTEGRITY, WEALTH AND FAMILY BLESSING

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Job himself is introduced as someone who has achieved the pinnacle of success in life. He is a man of integrity, "*blameless and upright*," who fears God and shuns evil (1:1). He has been blessed with a large family, including sons and daughters. He has many servants and is a person of means, with flocks of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys—a notable achievement in an agrarian society with no established currency. In short, **Job has it all**.

David Clines: The one thing needful in the preface to the poem of Job the righteous sufferer is that "there must be no room for the misgiving that the sufferer's afflictions are the due reward of his deeds" (Peake). The opening sentence establishing Job's blamelessness is given precedence over the more external description of Job's family and wealth, since it is his moral rectitude that will be put in question by events of the narrative. Reference to his children and possessions, however, functions not as a decorative addition to the portrayal of the man, but as tangible evidence of his uprightness. The fundamental assertion of Job's blamelessness is reverted to in the last two verses of this unit, where a cameo scene depicts how scrupulous he is to ensure that his innocence extends beyond himself to the members of his family. At the same time, by bringing the children within the ambit of the story, it prepares for the third scene, in which their fate is portrayed.

G. Campbell Morgan: The language describing his character is simple and yet almost exhaustive in its suggestiveness of that high integrity which never fails to command respect. It is described as to **manifestation** and **inspiration**.

In outward **manifestation** he was perfect and upright, a description which indicates moral blamelessness rather than sinless perfection.

The **inspiration** of this integrity was that "*he feared God and eschewed evil*." The morality of Job was based on his religion, and was the necessary outcome thereof. This is the only root-principle out of which a strong and abiding morality ever grows.

Norman Habel: The opening verses of the book (vs. 1-5) are a pretemporal exposition or prelude which provides background information for both the first movement and the total narrative. Job is introduced as a patriarchal figure from the heroic past. He is the epitome of piety, wisdom, and success. His goodness extends to periodic priestly acts of mediation on behalf of his family to ward off the fatal sin of "*cursing God*."

I. (:1) JOB'S PIETY AND INTEGRITY – JOB'S WISDOM

A. Identity of the Godly Man

1. Identity by Location

“There was a man in the land of Uz,”

Robert Alden: Unlike most Hebrew sentences, which begin with the verb, this one begins with the noun “*a man*.” Such deviations from the usual order of verb-subject-object are often for **emphasis**. Could it be that the humanity, the finitude, the frailty of the major character is the point of the text in making “*a man*” the first word? “*Lived*” translates a simple verb “to be,” literally, “*A man was in the land of Uz*.”

Cyril Barber: Job lived in a city that was the edge of civilization. It was surrounded by vast stretches of land, some of which was wild and desolate while other portions were arable. The wilderness area was a place frequented by brigands who roamed about freely. These wily nomads would descend with speed on a town or village, and plunder and pillage with no thought for the value of human life (cf. **Judges 6:3, 33; 7:12; 8:10**) or the rights of others (cf. **Job 1:15, 17**).

John Robertson: “Uz” is “the name of an undefined land mentioned in three OT passages; i.e., **Jer. 25:20ff; Lam. 4:21** and **Job 1:1**. In **Lam. 4:21** it is the land where the ‘*daughter of Edom*’ dwelt. In these passages the land of Uz seems to be related to the Edomites and Seir” (**ISBE** v. 4, pp. 959).

Robert Alden: “*The land of Uz*,” as best we can guess, was in the area of northern Saudi Arabia or southern Jordan, which, since the time of the patriarchs has been called Edom. The names of Job's friends and their homes also point to locales in the desert country east and south of the Dead Sea.

2. Identity by Name

“whose name was Job,”

John Hartley: A patriarch is usually introduced in the biblical text with a full genealogy (e.g., Abraham, **Gen. 11:26–29**); thus it is noteworthy that Job is introduced without genealogy and without reference to his tribe or clan. There is also no specific reference to the time when Job lived. The author thereby masterfully composes a literary piece in which Job is **representative of all who suffer**.

B. Idealized Godly Characteristics

1. Blameless

“and that man was blameless,”

Bob Utley: “*blameless, upright*” -- These two terms are often together in the OT (cf. **Ps.**

25:21; 37:37). They speak of moral rectitude and compliance with the religious light of the day.

2. Upright “upright,”

John Hartley: The first pair, *blameless* (*tām*) and *upright* (*yāšār*), indicates that Job was a person of pure motivation. Heb. *tām* frequently designates a sacrificial animal as “spotless, without blemish,” but when used with a person it means **personal integrity**, not sinless perfection (**Josh. 24:14; Judg. 9:16, 19**). The blameless person is one who walks in close fellowship with God (**Gen. 17:1**) and who delights in obeying the law (**Ps. 119:1**). He serves God wholeheartedly. The word *upright* depicts faithful adherence to God’s statutes (cf. **1 K. 14:8; 15:5**) and an honest, compassionate manner in relating to others. Job treated others, including his servants, fairly and justly (**31:13–23**). Also he zealously showed mercy to the unfortunate.

Warren Wiersbe: He was not sinless, for nobody can claim that distinction, but he was complete and mature in character and “straight” in conduct. The word translated “perfect” is related to “integrity,” another important word in Job (**2:3, 9: 27:5; 31:6**). People with integrity are whole persons, without hypocrisy or duplicity. In the face of his friends’ accusations and God’s silence, Job maintained his integrity, and the Lord ultimately vindicated him.

3. God-Fearer “fearing God,”

Derek Kidner: **Fearing God** is the very soul of godliness. It is the attribute, above all others, that reflects a right relationship of a sinner to Almighty God. It is the response of a sinner towards the greatness of God. Reverence, awe and submission are its chief components, as is the notion of being afraid when there is just cause for it. A person who fears God puts God first in every area of life. God is not thought of as an equal, still less an inferior, but an all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present god who may do with us as he wills.

Fearing God is not the cowering gesture of one who is terrified by God, though unconfessed, unmortified sin in our lives may, and should, elicit such a response. Rather, it is an honest acknowledgement that God is greater than us in every way. We are never on his level and that is why submission becomes a crucially important issue in Job. Above everything else, Job’s attitude to God will eventually be seen to be one of acquiescence. Job may not, indeed, does not, understand what is going on in his life, but he resolves to place his trust in God. . .

Job’s attitude, thus far at least, was one of unquestioning submission to God, ever careful to acknowledge the Lord as King in his life. He was careful never to speak about God, or to God in a flippant, ill-thought manner. He avoided attributing to God motives ill-befitting the sovereign Creator and Redeemer. He sought each day to abide

by the rule that God should be glorified in his life. In this way Job feared God. Of course, it is easier to acknowledge God's goodness when life is free from pain. That is the test to which Job is now put: will he continue to fear God when everything around him is giving way?

4. Evil-Hater

“and turning away from evil.”

Tremper Longman: He was “innocent” (*tām*) and “virtuous” (*yāšār*), fearing God and turning away from evil. Significantly, this language has close affinities with the description of the wise in the book of Proverbs (“innocent”: **Prov. 2:7, 21; 11:3, 20; 13:6; 19:1; 20:7; 28:6, 10, 18; 29:10**; “virtuous”: **1:3; 2:7, 21; 8:6, 9; 11:3, 6; 12:6; 14:11; 15:8; 16:13; 20:11; 21:2, 8; 23:16; 29:10**). In Proverbs these terms 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.

Robert Alden: “Shunned” or “turned from” represents the other side of the coin from “feared God.” The first phrase was positive; the second is negative. Good people turn to God and away from evil. The good life involves not only the doing of right but also the avoidance of wrong. Again, “evil” was defined as mainly overt acts such as those Eliphaz listed in **22:6-9**—ruthless and cruel demanding of collateral and conscious neglect of the weary and hungry, the widow and orphan. In **29:12-17** Job countered these charges and added more good deeds to his list, all of which reflect his fear of God and his shunning of evil.

II. (:2-3) JOB'S PROSPERITY – JOB'S WEALTH

A. (:2) Perfect Family

“And seven sons and three daughters were born to him.”

Tremper Longman: The children are described in a way that shows he has a large and, for an ancient Near Eastern context, well-balanced family. Ten children constitute a good-sized family, and that there are more boys than girls also would be considered a blessing. Indeed, that there are seven sons is especially significant because seven is the number of completeness. His quiver is indeed full (**Pss. 127; 128**).

David Thompson: Quoting **Dr. E.W. Bullinger** who points out that the number ten in the Bible implies divine completeness of order. For example, there are the Ten Commandments, there are the tenth tithes, in the tabernacle there are ten curtains, pillars and sockets. There were ten plagues to Egypt and in the finale of world powers that will bring everything to a conclusion, there are ten (**Rev. 12:3; 13:1**) (**Bullinger**, *Number in Scripture*, pp. 243-250).

B. (:3a) Plentiful Possessions

*“His possessions also were
7,000 sheep,
3,000 camels,
500 yoke of oxen,
500 female donkeys,
and very many servants;”*

Kim Kuhfuss:

1. 7000 sheep – Used for clothing and for food
2. 3000 camels (like 7 sons and 3 daughters) used for long trips
3. 500 Oxen – Beasts of burden to do the labor around house
4. 500 donkeys – Used for doing labor of short trips

C. (:3b) Preeminent Reputation

“and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.”

Tremper Longman: He is described as “*fearing God*” as well as “*innocent and virtuous*,” an evaluation that is repeated twice by God himself (**1:8; 2:3**). In this way, the reader knows something for certain about Job that has not been disclosed to the human participants of the book. As one interprets the action and dialogue that follow, there can be no doubt about Job’s innocence. As an innocent man, Job enjoys great rewards: wealth, health, and a large and happy family.

Cyril Barber: Female donkeys were highly prized in the ancient Near East for they could breed and produce offspring.

III. (:4-5) JOB’S PRIESTLY PRECAUTION TO PRESERVE HOLINESS – JOB’S WATCHFULNESS

A. (:4) Sibling Special Feasts

*“And his sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day,
and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.”*

John MacArthur: Each of the seven sons had an appointed day of the week. This reference to the main meal of each day of the week, which moved from house to house, implies the love and harmony of the family members. The sisters are especially noted to show these were cared for with love.

John Hartley: While the language may indicate that there were continuous rounds of feasting, it is more probable that each son periodically held a nonreligious feast, possibly a birthday celebration. This detail witnesses to the closeness and the affluence of Job’s family, not to the fact that Job’s children were given to frivolous living.

Izak Cornelius: Job’s children attended feasts organized by his sons, where they ate and drank wine for seven days (**v. 18**). These feasts were not religious since such occasions

would have been celebrated at the house of their father, Job; some of them may have been **birthday parties**. The **banquet motif** was well known in ancient times and is often depicted in art. Egyptian paintings depict lavish banquets where males and females mingle, are treated with delicacies, and are entertained by music and dance. Mesopotamian banquets appear on cylinder seals, on Assyrian reliefs, and on the “standard of Ur.” In the Old Testament itself it occurs in **Psalm 23:5**, where the Lord is the host. The Ugaritic hero Dan’el also gave the deities food.

B. (:5) Sin Offerings to Ensure Careful Consecration

1. Consecration Offerings

“And it came about, when the days of feasting had completed their cycle, that Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all;”

2. Careful Consideration

“for Job said, ‘Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’”

3. Consistent Practice

“Thus Job did continually.”

Elmer Smick: **Verse 5** reveals that Job, like the patriarchs, functions as a **priest** for his family. He takes his sacrificial obligation seriously, viewing it as expiation for sin. To Job this includes even sins of the heart, for he makes special offerings just in case his sons have secretly cursed God. The matter of **cursing** or not cursing God becomes a key theme in the development of this drama.

Francis Andersen: Job’s religion was inward and spiritual; but it recognized the need for ceremonies and sacrifices. His own act of intercession, in offering burnt offerings to restore the holiness (sanctify) of his children, shows a belief in the power of a mediator that will lead to his desire later on that someone should do the same for him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it so critical to establish the integrity of Job at the beginning of this story?
- 2) What are the key characteristics of a man who fears God?
- 3) How do proponents of the prosperity gospel interpret the wealth of Job?
- 4) What would be some of the characteristics of family harmony in our day?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Alden: The man Job, whom I take to have been an actual, historical person, is described as a wealthy man from the East (1:1-3). **Presuppositions** determine whether one believes Job really lived or was simply the subject of a legend like Paul Bunyan or Hans Brinker. Unless clearly indicated otherwise, I assume that the Bible speaks of real people and places. Nothing in the text suggests that Job was a mythical, imaginary, or fictitious figure. True, there is a seeming artificiality about the numbers of his cattle (1:3; 42:12) and a certain standardization in the way the tragedies were reported (1:13-19), but this does not impinge on the **historicity** of the account. Everything said about him is well within the realm of possibility. He did not do superhuman feats nor possess any magical power. Except for his extraordinary wealth and exceptional piety, he was like countless others past and present.

David Clines: This little scene, in vv 4-5, has been narrated in the typically faux naïf style of our storyteller. Without any appearance of extravagance in the narration (no adjectives, no adverbs of quantity) the scene is rich in every aspect. There is uninterrupted domestic felicity, to which the sisters' presence at the festivities lends a further emphasis. There is an unbroken pattern of existence, in which the children's absorption in pleasure is matched by Job's devotion to their protection. There is his extraordinary scrupulousness that must cover even unseen sin, that must bestir itself "early in the morning," that must offer not one sacrifice but ten, that must never fail in its responsibility but "do so continually." This unwavering routine, no burden to Job any more than it is to his children, is not a monotony but the ominous prelude to an irruption into the lives of all.

Cyril Barber: The opening verse of **chapter 1** gives us a clue as to the chief principle to be learned from a careful consideration of the book of Job. It is found in the words *the fear of the Lord*. Job lived in reverential awe of God. He was content to live under God's sovereign control of his life, and he turned away from evil. As a result he was both happy and successful. And when he was baffled by extreme and unexpected trials, he still held fast to his integrity.

David Thompson: Apparently, either meals were held every day at a different boy's home on a rotating basis, or on one of the boy's birthdays, all of the other sons would go to the birthday boy's home and they would invite their sisters to join them. They would have a meal and they would drink wine (1:13).

Commentators believe that this inviting of the sisters is to show exceptional affection, not impropriety. In the story, Job's family has no cause for destruction. Job was so wealthy that each of his children could have his own house. There is no hint that these parties were immoral or that they would all get drunk, but the potential was there. Job does not forbid them from having these parties and he was, by God's analysis, the most spiritual man on earth.

After the feasts ended, Job would rise early in the morning, send for each child, and offer a burnt offering for every one of his children. Job continually did this. Now notice why—he was taking precautionary steps in view of the fact that he wanted his children’s hearts right with God. He did not want them sinning and he did not want them cursing God. He wanted them right with God. This was the driving priority of Job’s life as a father.

Derek Kidner: Job was not an Israelite, but from the “*east*.” Nevertheless, true faith transcends national boundaries, for it is immediately evident that Job was a true believer. His trials are all the more painful because of it. Many in Job’s day entertained the notion that faith ought to alleviate trouble, not increase it. This is a view that continues to trouble faithful men and women of God. It is one of the abiding lessons of the book of Job that Christians can expect to suffer. Even if the **cause** of suffering remains a mystery, the **fact** of it does not. Some of the wisest and godliest have known lives of the most excruciating tragedy. Reckon on it, the Bible seems to say to us, and you will not go far wrong. Protest, and you will discover that it will only add to your difficulties. In God’s ordering of our lives, for reasons best known to him, he allows some features to be bent out of shape. There is, in each one of our lives, to cite a phrase of **Thomas Boston**, “a crook in our lot”.

TEXT: Job 1:6-12

TITLE: THE CHALLENGE INITIATING JOB'S TRIALS

BIG IDEA:

**THE REMOVAL OF PROSPERITY PUTS OUR DEVOTION TO GOD TO THE TEST --
GOD ALLOWS SATAN TO TEST JOB'S MOTIVATION FOR WORSHIP**

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: Here we learn what Job never learns, that his suffering had a particular cause and that it subserved a purpose. The **cause** of Job's suffering is unmistakably Satan's challenge that Job's piety is not disinterested and God's acceptance of the challenge; the **purpose** of the suffering is to substantiate God's assessment of Job's piety and so justify God's claim to disinterested piety from humans.

Robert Alden: A **dialogue** between the Lord and the Satan fills **vv. 7-12**. Mainly it is a question-and-answer session. At first the Lord asks the questions (**vv. 7-8**), and the Satan answers. In **vv. 9-10** the Satan asks the questions. The Lord does not exactly answer the questions but simply grants the accuser a limited amount of freedom to persecute Job. The dialogue ends with the Satan leaving the presence of the Lord.

Tremper Longman: The **introduction of main characters** of the book continues, though Yahweh appears in person only at the beginning and end of the book and the accuser only at the beginning. However, it is their interaction that sets the plot in motion.

Roy Zuck: Satan's subtle suggestion that worship is basically selfish hits at the heart of man's relationship to God. The Book of Job does more than raise the question of the suffering of the righteous. It also, through Satan's words, deals with the **motives for godly living**. Will anyone serve the Lord if he enjoys no personal gain from it? Is worship a coin that buys a heavenly reward? Is piety part of a contract by which to gain wealth and ward off trouble?

(:6) PROLOGUE – SATAN APPROACHES GOD

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.”

Francis Andersen: The ‘host of heaven’ (e.g. **1 Kgs 22:19**) consists of all superhuman beings, including stars (**Job 38:7**). As God's attendants these creatures are called ‘messengers’ or ‘angels’ (e.g. **Gen. 32:2**; cf. **Ps. 103:20**) or ‘slaves’ (e.g. **Job 4:18**). As associates of God they are ‘holy ones’ (**Job 5:1**). As supervisors of God's realm, such agents were later called ‘watchers’ (**Dan. 4:13, 17, 23**), active in the affairs of men,

patrolling the earth (**Zech. 1:10f.; 6:5f.**) to observe and to protect. One of the great names of God—*The Lord of hosts*—probably means that he is the sole Creator of them all, leaving no room whatever for polytheism. Another name for these beings is the sons of God or, simply, ‘*gods*’ (**Ps. 97:7**) or ‘*spirits*’ (**Zech. 6:5**). When gathered in assembly they constitute ‘*the divine council*’ (**Ps. 82:1**) or ‘*the assembly of the holy ones*’ (**Ps. 89:5**) or ‘*the council of the holy ones*’ (**Ps. 89:7**). Since in Israel only the Lord received divine honours, his supremacy is never in doubt. He presided over the meeting like a king on his throne. The angel courtiers are seen surrounding him when a man is granted a glimpse of his splendour (**1 Kgs 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Gen. 28:12**).

David Atkinson: **Job 1** does not use the word ‘*heaven*’, but it refers to ‘*the presence of the LORD*’ (**1:12**) to mean exactly this. There is **another realm**, another place, where God holds council with his heavenly court and where actions are taken which affect people on earth. Job does not see this. There is no indication that he is ever aware of it. In fact, it is centrally important to the story that he is completely unaware of this whole dimension to his predicament. All Job knows is the suffering which results. But we, the readers, are told. We are given a glimpse of the heavenly realm of which Job himself remains ignorant.

John Hartley: Here the Hebrew word *haśśāṭān* has the article, so it functions as a **title** rather than as a personal name. The Hebrew root *śṭn* means “*to oppose at law*.” On this basis some scholars conjecture that the Satan may be the prosecuting attorney of the heavenly council. If this view is correct, his task on earth was to discover human sins and failures and to bring his findings before the heavenly assembly. But his role in this scene deviates from this explanation. Instead of uncovering disruptive plans, he acts as a troublemaker, a disturber of the kingdom. . .

The main function of this assembly here is to provide an **open forum** in which Yahweh permits the testing of Job. That is, the plan to test Job was not hatched in a secret meeting between Yahweh and the Satan. Rather it was decided openly before the heavenly assembly. In this setting Yahweh’s motivation, based on his complete confidence in Job, was fully known and thus it was above question.

I. (:7-8) DIVINE TESTIMONY TO JOB’S DEVOTION -- TWO QUESTIONS FROM THE LORD TO SATAN

A. (:7) Question #1 – What Is Satan Up To?

1. Question

“*And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’*”

Cyril Barber: Of course the Lord knew where Satan had been and why he had come before Him. He, however, asked what he had been doing. To this question He received the surly and somewhat evasive reply, “*From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it*” (**1:7**).

2. Response

*“Then Satan answered the LORD and said,
‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’”*

Albert Barnes: In **Zechariah 4:10**, it is applied to “*the eyes of Yahweh*,” which are said to “*run to and fro through the earth*,” that is, he surveys all things as one does whose eye passes rapidly from object to object. The same phrase occurs in **2 Chronicles 16:9**. In **Jeremiah 5:1**, it is applied to the action of a man passing rapidly through the streets of a city. “*Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem*” compare Jeremiah 49:3. From these passages it is clear that the idea is not that of going “in a circuit” or circle, but it is that of passing rapidly; of moving with alacrity and in a hurry; and it is not improbable that the “original” idea is that suggested in the Arabic of “heat” - and thence applied to a whip or scourge because it produces a sensation like burning, and also to a rapid journey or motion, because it produces heat or a glow. It means that Satan had been active and diligent in passing from place to place in the earth to survey it. The Chaldee adds to this, “*to examine into the works of the sons of men*.”

B. (:8) Question #2 – What is Job Up To?

1. Question

“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job?’”

John Piper: It’s as though a diamond thief should meet the owner at the back of a jewelry store late at night. The owner says, “What are you doing?” And the thief answers, “Just walking around in your store.” And then the owner says, “Did you see our most precious diamond up there at the front?”

Chuck Smith: The word *considered* is the word that I'm interested in, though, because it is actually a **military term**. It is the term that is used of a general who is studying a city before he attacks it in order that he might develop his strategy whereby he can destroy the city. So he's watching when they open the gates, the method of which they open the gates. How do the people come out? What gates are the most easily attacked? And he's developing his whole strategy in order that he might attack and destroy the city. That's the Hebrew word, the background of the word. It's a military term. "Have you been studying Job? **Seeking to develop the strategy whereby you might destroy him?** Have you considered my servant Job?"

2. Testimony

*“For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man,
fearing God and turning away from evil.”*

David Clines: **Job is God’s boast.** Not only does God endorse the author’s characterization of Job in v 1, using exactly the same words, “*a man blameless and upright, a God-fearer, a shunner of evil*,” but also denominates Job “*my servant*” and declares “*there is none like him in the earth*.” (It is of course equally the author’s evaluation of Job whether he expresses it in his own person in v 1 or sets it in the mouth of God in v 8, but he means to dispel any shadow of doubt that Job’s piety may be only

seeming and to have the God from whom Job's afflictions will stem affirm his own cognizance of Job's character.)

II. (:9-12) SATANIC CHALLENGE OF JOB'S MOTIVATION FOR DEVOTION

A. (:9-11) Challenge Proposed

1. (:9) The Provoking Taunt

"Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?'"

Francis Andersen: The Satan asks his sneering question: *Does Job fear God for nought?* He knows enough about religious people to be persuaded that they are in it for what they can get out of it.

Robert Alden: The question cuts to the heart of genuine faith. The issue is whether God deserves to be worshiped because of the greatness of his character or must "buy" his worship with gifts and promises of blessing. The serpent raised a similar issue when he accused God of being less than good and honest (**Gen 3:12-15**).

David Atkinson: But the Satan, whose preoccupation with hunting out wrongdoing has produced a cynicism which is destructive, replies to God in effect, 'Do you think Job's piety is all for nothing? You don't think he does all this without expecting some reward, do you? In any case, he is a bad example of piety – you, God, have hedged him in with so much wealth, richness, and family support (**1:10**). No wonder he is good! In the real world of pain, of bereavement, of struggle, people are not good. Take away Job's possessions and he will fail – he will curse you to your face. Goodness cannot survive in the real world of human pain.'

2. (:10) The Protective Hedge of Blessing

*"Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house
and all that he has, on every side?
Thou hast blessed the work of his hands,
and his possessions have increased in the land."*

Robert Alden: **Verse 10** lists three categories: "him," "his household," and "everything he has." In this verse the Satan receives permission to afflict only the last two. The affliction of Job's body would be the substance of the second test (2:7).

3. (:11) The Proposed Test

*"But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has;
he will surely curse Thee to Thy face."*

Francis Andersen: So the basic questions of the book are raised. God's character and Job's are both slighted. Is God so good that he can be loved for himself, not just for his gifts? Can a man hold on to God when there are no benefits attached? The Satan suggests a test to prove his point.

Charles Swindoll: Here we witness the Accuser's personality.

- We know that he has an **intellect** because he converses with the Lord.
- We see that Satan has **emotions** because he is antagonistic toward Job.
- He also has **volition** because he purposes to destroy Job in hopes of disgracing God.

B. (:12a) Challenge Accepted

"Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.'"

John Hartley: This scene and its counterpart in **2:1–7a** are essential for the audience to comprehend the spiritual dimensions of Job's trial. They afford insight into God's evaluation of Job and his confidence that under the severest testing his servant will prove that this evaluation is well-founded. Without knowledge of God's position the dialogue would be meaningless and Job's stubbornness would be thought the height of self-delusion. In order to make a proper assessment of Job's complaint the audience must know God's attitude toward Job and his direction of the events that will befall Job.

Derek Kidner: God will place his children in situations where it will not be easy to believe, where great reserves of faith will be needed to survive, where the most basic convictions will be called into question. There will be times when it will be difficult to believe that God is gracious, when faith will be stretched to the limits of endurance and the love of God is veiled and obscured. These are moments that God has brought about. He may use Satan in the process, but ultimately it comes from him. Our suffering is at the hands of one who loves us, not one who despises us. God, and not Satan, has the key to our recovery. "When we consider the power and policy of Satan," comments **Joseph Caryl**, "let us bless God that he cannot stir to do us that mischief which his nature at once inclines and enables him to do, until God permits him."

(:12b) EPILOGUE – SATAN DEPARTS FROM GOD

"So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what ways does Satan try to act as your accuser before God?
- 2) How would God characterize your Christian walk? Are you living as a trophy of His grace and power?
- 3) Do you perceive God's sovereignty over the details of your life and circumstances as extending even to the initiation of trials that cause you pain?

4) What is your motivation for serving and worshiping God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Atkinson: God's reply is to give Satan the freedom to try Job out. God sets the bounds. There is evil here, but **not dualism**, and perhaps we need to pause to register that fact. A great deal of popular Christian thinking operates with a sort of dualism, in which the whole of life is understood in terms of a battle between God and Satan, or between the Holy Spirit and the world of the demonic, as though these were all equal partners in a contest. Of course it is sometimes easier to interpret our lives in terms of a conflict between heavenly powers than to take appropriate responsibility ourselves. But a dualism of good and evil is not the teaching of the Bible. While we must not ignore the reality of spiritual warfare, we must remember that the contest is not between equals. There is no equal and opposite force of evil in tension with the goodness of God. Such a view is not found in the Bible. Rather, God is always sovereign. And Satan is always only an adversary on a chain. Satan is always under God's authority and control. It is the sovereign God who says, *'Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger'* (1:12). So Satan, we are told, went out from the presence of the Lord.

Elmer Smick: The Accuser insinuates that Job's allegiance is hypocritical (v.9). If only God would remove the protective hedge he has placed about Job (v.10), this "devout" servant would certainly curse God to his face. The attack is on God through Job, and the only way the Accuser can be proven false is through Job. So Satan is given limited but gradually increased access to Job—first to his possessions, then to his family, and finally to his physical well-being. But through it all, in the words of **M. Kline**, 461, "the primary purpose of Job's suffering, unknown to him, was that he should stand before men and angels as a trophy of the saving might of God, an exhibit of that divine wisdom which is the archetype, source, and foundation of true human wisdom."

Derek Kidner: Four features of Satan's personality and purpose are forthcoming from the passage:

1) Satan is the accuser –

He is constantly engaged in levelling charges against God's children, charges which are both hurtful and intent on causing the maximum damage. There is not an ounce of goodness in Satan's character. His every action is bent on one thing: our total demise

2) Satan is the wanderer –

In reply to the question as to where he had been and what he had been doing, Satan said, *"From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it"* (1:7). It is the "confession of a vagabond spirit, pacing the earth with the frustration of a caged lion and preying upon unsuspecting victims", comments **David McKenna**, adding: "Stan

epitomizes the ultimate of evil, when alienation, aimlessness, and anxiety – the essence of hell – obsess the soul.”

3) Satan is the cynic –

For Satan – who is incapable of appreciating righteousness in Job – every act of human goodness must have a sinister, self-serving, or squalid explanation.

4) Satan is the tormentor –

Charles Swindoll: Four principles emerge that seem relevant.

Principle one: There is an enemy we encounter we cannot see . . . but he is real.

Principle two: There are trials we endure we do not deserve, but they are permitted.

Principle three: There is a plan we explore we will not understand, but it is best.

Principle four: There are consequences we experience, we could not anticipate, but they are necessary.

David Thompson: GOD, AT TIMES, WILL APPARENTLY ALLOW HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS ON EARTH TO SUFFER ON FULL DISPLAY BEFORE THE ANGELS OF HEAVEN SO THAT THE ENTIRE ANGELIC WORLD WILL STAND IN AWE OF GOD’S SOVEREIGN WORK, GRACE AND GLORY.

Did we ever stop to consider that our suffering and hardships may be sovereignly ordained of God to make a powerful statement to God’s angels? Did it ever cross our minds that God may be sovereignly entrusting us with a series of negatives so angels, both good and bad, may watch God’s grace displayed through our difficult drama? When these angels see one of God’s faithful people endure hardships without whining, moaning, complaining, doubting, disbelieving and cursing, it displays for them the glory and power of God. . .

We get a good glimpse here as to how Satan mixes false things with true things. He never tells the truth because he is the father of lies, but he does use part truth to mix with part error.

False Accusation #1 - Job fears God for nothing. **1:9**

True Accusation #2 - God has a hedge around Job. **1:10a**

True Accusation #3 - God has blessed the work of Job. **1:10b**

False Accusation #4 - Job will curse God if God takes away His blessings. **1:11**

Notice as great as Satan thinks he is, he is not sovereign. Only God is sovereign and whatever Satan does is by His sovereign permission.

- If you are God, you know what is going to happen.
- If you are Satan, you think you know what is going to happen.

- If you are the angels, you are very interested to see what will happen—this is big time drama.
- But what if you are Job? You have absolutely no idea what is happening or why it is happening. All you have to hold on to all through this is your concept of the sovereignty of God and that is it. He'll lose everything else except his grasp of God, and it will be his grasp of God that will prove to be enough!

TEXT: Job 1:13-22

TITLE: *PASSING THE FIRST TEST –
MAINTAINING DEVOTION TO GOD WHEN OVERWHELMED BY DISASTERS*

BIG IDEA:
**SEEMINGLY UNDESERVED DISASTERS TEST OUR SPIRITUAL
FOUNDATION**

INTRODUCTION:

Tremper Longman: The news Job had just heard was devastating. His wealth and his children were gone. All he had left at this point were his wife and his health. His initial reaction indicates his grief. Tearing one's clothes (see also **Gen. 37:34; Josh. 7:6; 2 Sam. 1:11; 3:31; 13:31; Ezra 9:3, 5; Esther 4:1**) and shaving one's head (**Isa. 22:12; Jer. 7:29; 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37; Ezek. 7:18; Amos 8:10**) are signs of **mourning**. But when he speaks, he does not lament, complain, or weep. Rather, he resigns himself to his fate, which he acknowledges God has brought on him. But he goes further than resignation. He actually worships the God who has taken away that which is dear to him.

John Hartley: These four plagues revealed to Job that all the forces of heaven and earth had turned hostile toward him. This idea is borne out by the fact that the causes of destruction alternate between earthly and heavenly forces coming from all four points of the compass: the Sabeans from the south, lightning from a storm out of the west, the Chaldeans from the north, and the treacherous sirocco blowing off the desert to the east. The number four also symbolizes full measure, totality.

Cyril Barber: When we remember that in the ancient Near East a man's wealth was estimated by the size of his flocks and herds, his servants who waited on him, and the number of his sons, we realize how intent Satan was on depriving Job of everything that could contribute to his wealth and happiness, and prestige within the community. Furthermore, in order to secure maximum impact, Satan arranged for the tragic news of **1:13-19** to come like hammer blows, one after another.

David Clines: The focus is entirely upon Job, and not upon the disasters themselves, for the issues of the prologue revolve entirely about this man. Dramatically, the spotlight remains fixed upon Job, since the narrative advances only to the measure in which Job himself becomes aware of the disasters. The device of the messengers admirably focuses concentration upon Job rather than upon the scenes of disaster, and at the same time creates an atmosphere of accelerating doom: each messenger after the first arrives before his predecessor has told his tale; each messenger is the sole survivor of the disaster he describes. The unbroken succession of messengers further heightens the tension the hearer feels concerning Job's reaction; he cannot respond emotionally to any

calamity until he responds to them all; for, after all, they are in reality one and the same calamity in design and in effect.

(:13) PROLOGUE – PROSPERITY AND PEACE

“Now it happened on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,”

John Hartley: The third scene opens as did the second with the phrase *One day*. Since no one on earth was aware of the agreement between Yahweh and the Satan, all things at Job's household continued as usual. The atmosphere was **peaceful**. Scrupulous Job would have recently offered whole burnt offerings to atone for any possible sin either in his children's lives or in his life. His sons had joyfully begun a new round of feasting at the home of the eldest. The mention of wine is an artistic touch that pictures the children's anticipated joy. That is, the tragedy of the coming events stands out more sharply against the background of the children's excitement at the beginning of a new round of feasting.

I. (:14-19) FOUR DISASTERS REPORTED TO JOB – ONE RIGHT AFTER THE OTHER – HOW SEVERE ARE YOUR TRIALS?

A. (:14-15) Loss of Farm Animals and Servants

*“that a messenger came to Job and said,
‘The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’”*

Elmer Smick: the coming of the messengers of misfortune each on the heels of the other (vv.14, 16, 17, 18), all on that one fateful day, has its dramatic effect heightened by the narrator's style.

B. (:16) Loss of Flocks and Shepherds

*“While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
‘The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’”*

John Hartley: Job's flocks were grazing contentedly when the *fire of God*, i.e., a tremendous bolt of lightning, fell from heaven and lapped up everything in the area, including the flocks and the shepherds. This calamity has an ironic twist: the Satan used God's fire against God's servant.

C. (:17) Loss of Camels and Servants

*“While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
‘The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels*

*and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword;
and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

Tremper Longman: the name Chaldean points to an origin of these invaders from southern Mesopotamia. They succeeded in taking Job’s camels (numbering three thousand, according to **1:3**) and killing the servants who were caring for them.

David Thompson: Job was **bankrupt**. His entire business world had just come crashing down. In one day his entire fortune was gone. He had no work and he had no workers. The greatest and richest man in the east was now flat broke.

D. (:18-19) Loss of Children

*“While he was still speaking, another also came and said,
‘Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest
brother's house, 19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness
and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people
and they died; and I alone have escaped to tell you.”*

MacArthur: This likely refers to a tornado-type wind (see **Isaiah 21:1; Hosea 13:15**).

Robert Alden: For the fourth and last catastrophe the author offered more detail. This is also the only episode in this first stage of testing that employs the particle *hinn h*, “*behold*,” suggesting this is the **climactic episode**. While the number of Job's children did not compare with the numbers of lost livestock, there is no comparing the grief that arises from losing children.

II. (:20-21) GODLY RESPONSE OF JOB – HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO ADVERSITY?

A. (:20) Worshiping God While Mourning

*“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head,
and he fell to the ground and worshiped.”*

David Clines: What we have been waiting for is **Job’s reaction** to the news. The narrator has artfully kept us waiting; though the spotlight has been upon Job from the beginning of the scene, we have not heard one word from him or had an inkling of how the news registers with him. All that survives to him of his former prosperity and rank are four anonymous messengers, whom even a quite unsophisticated audience will easily recognize as owing their survival entirely to the exigencies of narrative art (the manner of their escape is of no interest whatever); for the purposes of this story, Job is alone and unattended by house servants when he receives the messengers, and even his wife is kept out of sight until her significant appearance in **2:9**.

Robert Alden: The tearing and the shaving are the expected reactions to the tragedies that suddenly and recently came to Job. The falling to the ground and worshipping are what separate him from others. He did not shake his fist skyward and scream, “Why

me, Lord?” but bowed to the ground in humble acknowledgment of and capitulation to God's sovereign will.

B. (:21) Blessing God While Being Bankrupted

*“And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked I shall return there.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.
Blessed be the name of the LORD.’”*

David Atkinson: Even in all this Job sees the hand of God. Amazingly, and significantly, his first instinct is to react Godwards – in worship. How few of us find that worship is our first reaction even at the best of times. But here is a man who is coping with a multiple bereavement. He has been afflicted with loss after loss. His sorrow is real and very great. How difficult it is to worship at such a time! Yet worship is Job's reaction. He is so absorbed by the sovereign action of God in giving and in taking away that there is a humble acceptance in blessing even the hand that has struck him. Would that we could learn to make that our first reaction to crisis – to pray. How important in pastoral ministry to seek to lead others who are in pain to place their needs before God.

David Atkinson: Job's exclamation is the noblest expression to be found anywhere of a man's joyful acceptance of the will of God as his only good. A man may stand before God stripped of everything that life has given him, and still lack nothing. His essential being came into life naked from his mother's body, and in that second birth into another world which is death, he will pass in similar nakedness.

David Clines: In this sentence, then, of response to the disaster that has befallen him, the Book of Job reaches—for the first time—what I argue in this commentary to be its primary aim: to portray **how one should behave under suffering**. No more sudden or catastrophic suffering could easily be imagined; how should a human being respond? Precisely as Job, without recrimination, self-pity, or rejection of reality, and with praise to the Lord of his being. Job is unarguably here set forth as an **exemplar of faith in crisis**. Nevertheless, the vast bulk of the Book of Job will depict a different Job, who is nevertheless the same man, a Job who finds such a response, though genuinely willed and in every respect real (and not to be misjudged as “unnaturally calm”; cf. **Hesse**), does not begin to match the turmoil of emotion that the events of this chapter come to awaken in him. There is no doubt that Job's behavior here is right, and therefore exemplary; whether it is possible—at least to persist in—is another matter. For some it may be, and they are to be congratulated. For the others, the rest of the book will portray another—though ultimately congruent—way.

(:22) EPILOGUE – UNCHANGING SPIRITUAL EQUILIBRIUM

“Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”

Robert Alden: Antecedent to “*this*” are the calamities of vv. 13-19. Any one of those events might have caused lesser men to lose faith, abandon hope, or even charge God with neglect or deliberate evil. The “sin” that Job did not commit was to accuse God of “wrongdoing.” He did indirectly acknowledge that God had sent these troubles, but he did not at this point question God's justice, love, wisdom, or sovereignty. It is a rare and commendable posture that the hero from Uz assumed, one that should characterize all God's children whatever turns life might take.

John Hartley: Mourning in silence, he gave his lips no opportunity to utter an angry curse or a cruel vindictive word. Thereby he honored God's trust in him and demonstrated the falsity of the Satan's taunts.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Satan pick this particular moment to attack Job? When are you most vulnerable to temptation and attack?
- 2) How is it possible to both deeply mourn and sincerely worship at the same time?
- 3) Do you have a sense of entitlement to your worldly possessions and wealth?
- 4) How do you harmonize Job's reaction here to the depths of his wrestling with God in the remainder of the book?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Alden: Thus the chapter ends with “the greatest man among all the people of the East” destitute, childless, and broken. In the space of less than a page and in a brief span of time, he went from being the greatest to being the least of men. We the readers know something that Job did not, and so we cannot enter into his sorrow. Like God, we know the end from the beginning. We know all about the fact that Job had been chosen as a test case. Because of his godliness God selected him for this trial. Job was unaware that his troubles were a great honor. Would Job remain faithful? Will we?

Elmer Smick: Job is ignorant of what has taken place in the divine council that God has allowed the Accuser to strike thus far. But Job is right—it is the Lord who has taken away. The use of secondary means does not solve the problem of evil, nor is it the purpose of the book of Job to solve this logical dilemma. In a real sense, Job's statement of trust in God goes as far as he or any human can go in solving this mystery.

When Job says, “*May the name of the LORD be praised*” (v.21), he is using, as noted, the same word that Satan used in v.11 as a euphemism with the opposite meaning. The

play on the root *brk* (“*bless*”) is forceful. It stresses how the Accuser is foiled at this point. Instead of cursing God to his face, Job praises him.

Here the author, being a Hebrew, uses that special covenantal name (*yhwh*) for God. Job and his friends are not Hebrews; so they use other Hebrew epithets for God—most often the general epithet *’elôah*. Here in the Prologue the composer of the book carefully identifies the Job of faith and wisdom as the same Job with questions and defiance in the Dialogue and Monologue units. But more important is his identification of the God of the Dialogue with the true God, whom the Hebrews worshiped.

David Atkinson: Things like this happen to everyone, if not always on the same scale. The intense faith of job immediately sees the hand of God in every ‘natural’ event. There are no ‘accidents’ in a universe ruled by the one sovereign Lord. Hence Job’s problem. Such mishaps are not a problem for the polytheist, the dualist, the atheist, the naturalist, the fatalist, the materialist, the agnostic. An annoyance, a tragedy even, but not a problem. Suffering caused by human wickedness or by the forces of nature is ultimately a problem only for a believer in the one Creator who is both good and almighty; so this problem can arise only within the Bible with its distinctive moral monotheism. . .

Job’s faith does not relieve his agony; it causes it. Job loved the Lord, his Father and Friend, as no Greek could ever love even the best of his gods, as no Babylonian, Canaanite or Egyptian could love any of their numerous gods. Contrary to the Satan’s forecast, Job has the same good opinion of God’s blessedness, even when things go wrong. But this faith cannot survive without a terrible struggle. Because Job sees nothing but the Lord’s hand in everything, how can he escape the horrible thought that God has done something bad? He knows no cause for such a willful act. It is harder to say ‘Praise the Lord’ when he takes away than when he gives. Job is hurled into a cauldron of doubt concerning the justice and equity of God’s ways with him. He must suffer and grow before he can see why this has happened. So far he has begun superbly. His confidence in God’s blessedness goes beyond Eli’s submissive resignation (**1 Sam. 3:18**), beyond David’s (**2 Sam. 16:11**), for these are receiving the just deserts of their wrong actions. Job does not have the satisfaction of knowing that he is paying for his sins, for he has none. None, at least, deserving of punishments of such magnitude. What, then, is God doing to him that he can perceive to be good (**Rom. 8:28**)? The answer to this question will be found only when we reach the end of the story.

David Thompson: WHEN TERRIBLE TROUBLE COMES AGAINST US WHEN WE DON’T HONESTLY DESERVE IT, MORE THAN LIKELY IT IS FROM SATAN AND HIS FORCES AND WE NEED TO DEMONSTRATE AN UNSWERVING FAITH IN GOD AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY.

Trials and troubles, especially when they come upon us for no seen or known reason, will really put us to the test as to what we really believe about God. It is nice to talk about how big and sovereign God really is, especially when things are sailing along

smooth as silk. But let things start falling apart and then you will see what one really believes about God and His sovereignty. . .

The tendency for most people is to curse God, to question God, or blame God. Job worshipped God and praised God. We need the same unswerving faith Job had in the sovereignty of God. God gives and God takes away, and let us trust His sovereignty when either happens to us.

One of the most important things we can do when tragedy strikes is to continue to trust God and worship God. This is a key to great future blessings.

Cyril Barber: Quoting **John Quincy Adams** --

*Send forth, O God, Your light and truth,
And let them lead me still,
Undaunted in the paths of right,
Up to Your holy hill . . .
O why, my soul, are you cast down?
Within me, why distressed? . . .
To Him my never failing Friend, I bow . . .
To Him shall thanks and praise ascend,
My Savior and my God.*

TEXT: Job 2:1-13

TITLE: *PASSING THE SECOND TEST --
MAINTAINING INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF PERPLEXING SUFFERING*

BIG IDEA:
SATAN'S INTENSIFIED ATTACKS FAIL TO CAUSE JOB TO FAIL

INTRODUCTION:

Robert Alden: They started as friends, but before the debates were over, Job used less-than-friendly words to describe them. Throughout this commentary these three will be called “*friends*” because that is the word in the text at this point. Though not an ideal term, it certainly is better than “comforters” (cf. **16:2**). These three probably were wealthy sheiks like Job. They had the time to talk for what may have been several months with their suffering comrade. Nothing is told about their families or stations in life. They seem to have come from a distance, yet they apparently spoke the same language and drew their illustrations and observations from the same common pool of experiences that Job had.

Tremper Longman: the accuser is not satisfied with the results of the first test and so presses for a second round. In the previous round, God had forbidden the accuser to touch Job personally. He could remove from him the things in which he found joy, his wealth and his children, but the accuser could not harm Job physically. The accuser now argues that God had not yet challenged Job’s piety. His very cynical view is that people only really, deep down, care about themselves. That is the explicit meaning of **2:4b**, “*People will give all they have for their life,*” and is probably the meaning of the enigmatic expression that precedes it, “*Skin for skin.*” In other words, **v. 4b** explicates the meaning of what is probably a proverbial saying whose exact sense is lost to us.

The accuser then suggests that harming Job will lead him to fail the test (“*curse you [God] to your face*”). God accepts the challenge, giving permission to harm Job, only restricting the accuser from killing him. The latter would, in any case, render the test moot, since a dead Job could not bless or curse God.

Derek Kidner: Suffering is part of what we may expect in the Christian life. Job received what he did not want and wished for that which he did not get. That is what suffering essentially is. What happened to Job can, and does, happen to every Christian in some form or another, for to some degree we all experience loss, hurt, pain, grief, weakness, rejection, injustice, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, ridicule, cruelty, anger and ill-treatment. There are moments in our lives when we are exposed to things that have the effect of making us want to run away.

David Thompson: We may be certain that Satan knows which buttons to press in an attempt to get people to turn from God and His Word. He has done this and succeeded

time and time again. Sometimes he will use some former struggle or sin to lure one away from God. Sometimes he will use some person or relationship to turn one away from God. Sometimes he will use some financial or emotional crisis to get one to turn from God, or he may use a physical crisis to lure one away from God.

When it came to Job, Satan threw everything at him that he could throw. He came at him from every angle and he didn't strike once. His multiple attacks came fast and furious.

When Job was going through all of this he had absolutely no idea why. This is a key point for us to realize. When we are going through difficulties we will not be able to figure it all out. We have no idea what is taking place behind the scenes. We don't know how Satan is working or what is going on between Satan and God. All we can do is trust God and continue to worship God.

(:1) PROLOGUE – SECOND HEAVENLY COUNCIL

A. Presence of Sons of God

“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD,”

B. Presence of Satan

“and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.”

David Clines: This fourth scene of the prologue is modeled very closely upon the second, with much **verbal repetition**. The doubling heightens the dramatic expectations, for the hearer or reader, in the process of realizing that a scene is being repeated, becomes at the same moment more alert for the novelties in the second presentation.

I. (:2-7) INTENSIFIED TEST OF JOB

A. (:2-3) Repetition of the Lord's Two Questions to Satan

1. (:2) Regarding the Activity of Satan – Pursuing the Righteous

“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth, and walking around on it.’”

2. (:3) Regarding the Activity of Job – Passing the Test

“And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.’”

John Hartley: Yahweh then boldly charged the Satan: *yet you incite me against him to ruin him without cause*. The word *incite* (Heb. *sût*) means to allure or stir someone to a course of action that he would not normally take. In this case Yahweh conceded that the Satan had persuaded him to act toward Job contrary to Job's just desert. With these words Yahweh accepted full responsibility for Job's plight. He would not concede any of his authority to the Satan. This point is crucial, for in the dialogue Job will seek deliverance from Yahweh alone and rightly so, for he has no battle with the Satan. This statement also explains why the Satan does not reappear in the epilogue. Yahweh himself feels obliged to resolve the conflict for Job.

David Thompson: The picture of "*holding fast*" to **integrity** is one in Hebrew of guarding one's integrity by holding tightly or to be strongly bound to it (**Gesenius**, p. 269). The "Hiphil" stem of the verb means to get possession or grab something you didn't once have and then bind yourself tightly to it (Ibid., p. 270). The word "*integrity*" is one that means to be whole and upright, to maintain one's full spirituality (Ibid., p. 866). His integrity meant that he was consistent and constant in his focus on God even when under attack.

Job had been severely attacked by Satan; but instead of crumbling and blaming God and shaking his fist at God, he grabbed tightly to a full and deeper spirituality and maintained his complete integrity. God said that Satan had incited Him to "*ruin him without cause*." What this means is that God had permitted this to happen to Job when Job had done nothing wrong in life to deserve this. Job stayed true to his commitment to the Lord. As **Robert Alden** said, "Job did not tarnish his perfect record" (Job, p. 64).

Now in my opinion, all of us have probably done and said things that would merit God to let us be ruined. But in His amazing grace He does not let it happen. Have you ever known any rebellious believer who has ever suffered like this? This is big time suffering about to hit the most faithful man on this earth. If you find that you are hit with negatives and you do deserve them, learn the lesson, repent and get it right with God and the negatives will leave. On the other hand, if you are hit with negatives and you don't deserve them, maintain your integrity, keep reverencing and worshipping God, and watch and see what God will do.

B. (:4-6) Response of Satan

1. (:4) Cynicism of Satan

*"And Satan answered the LORD and said,
'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.'"*

David Clines: But Job's maintaining his piety could have a more unhappy meaning: it could signify that the trial had not been severe enough. Indeed, it has been settled that deprivation of his material possessions and of his children has not shaken his piety; but suppose that "prosperity" includes physical and mental health; what then? The fact is that once the question of the causal nexus between piety and prosperity has been raised, it must be probed to the utmost extent.

David Atkinson: ‘*Skin for skin!*’ This is a very difficult verse to understand, but possibly means: ‘What we have done so far is just skin deep; we have only scratched the surface. Touch his own life – his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face’ (2:5).

Roy Zuck: “*Skin for skin*” was a proverbial saying, possibly about bartering or trading animal skins. Satan insinuated that Job had willingly traded the skins (lives) of his own children because in return God had given him his own skin (life). This again implied that Job was selfish.

2. (:5) Challenge of Satan

“However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face.”

3. (:6) Concession by the Lord

*“So the LORD said to Satan,
‘Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.’”*

David Clines: Yet it is of the essence of the Book of Job that from this critical moment onward heaven is sealed off and silent; God himself will not speak again before there have been thirty-four chapters of human speech (discursive and inconclusive, they render, on reflection, the direct decisiveness of heavenly speech in this prologue almost brutal); and earth will determinedly remain the locus of speech and action until the final sentences of the book.

C. (:7) Physical Attack against Job

*“Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD,
and smote Job with sore boils
from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.”*

Cyril Barber: The nature of Job’s illness can only be understood if we consider all that the Bible tells us. **Dr. Charles Ryrie** has a note in his study Bible in which he draws together all of the ailments which made Job’s disease both repulsive and painful: “The skin covering his entire body was affected (2:7), he itched intensely (v. 8), and he was in acute pain (v. 13). His flesh attracted worms and became crusty and hard (7:5). It oozed serum and turned dark in color (7:5; 30:30). Job also experienced fever and aching bones (30:17, 30). He may have had elephantiasis or a leukemia of the skin.

II. (:8-10) INTEGRITY OF JOB MAINTAINED DESPITE VARIETY OF RESPONSES TO HIS TRIAL

A. (:8) Physical Response of Job

*“And he took a potsherd to scrape himself
while he was sitting among the ashes.”*

Robert Alden: Job took a potsherd, or a piece of a broken clay pot, to scratch or scrape himself. Pots and potsherds illustrate commonness (**Prov 26:23**), insignificance (**Isa 30:14; Lam 4:2**), and fragility (**Jer 19:1, 10**). Unlike the verbs “took” and “scraped,” which are indicative, “sat” in line b is a participle that suggests a more or less permanent situation. One might translate, “*He was a dweller among the ashes.*” “Ashes” are one more characteristic element associated with mourning (**2 Sam 13:19; Esth 4:1, 3; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6**). “Ashes” would be the last word Job utters in this book (**42:6**).

E.S.P. Heavenor: *The ashes* is a reference to the local refuse-heap outside the walls of the town. There the dung and other rubbish was burnt at regular intervals. It was the happy hunting-ground for dogs on the prowl for carcasses which often were tossed there, and for the local urchins who were always eager to root about among things unwanted by others. There, in this place of discarded things, sat the man who once had been “*the greatest of all the people of the east*” (**1:3**).

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

B. (:9) Pressuring Response from Job's Wife

*“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity?
Curse God and die!’”*

Francis Andersen: Her question could be a taunt. ‘*Do you still insist on maintaining your integrity? What good has it done you?*’ If so, she has already lost faith, and wants Job to join her. At best her suggestion expresses a sincere desire to see Job out of his misery, and the sooner the better. She does not seem to see the possibility of the recovery of health and restoration of wealth. The friends do, and recommend repentance as the way to reverse Job's fortune. She sees death as the only good remaining for Job. He should pray to God (lit. ‘*bless*’) to be allowed to die, or even curse God in order to die, an indirect way of committing suicide.

John Hartley: His wife's appeal was more trying to Job than the losses themselves, for she spoke out of the strong emotional, marital bond between them. She put into words the essence of her husband's temptation: it is folly to adhere staunchly to one's integrity in the face of such tragedy. According to her view, to compromise one's faith in God in order to ease an intolerable burden is the wisest course to follow. On earth she echoed the Satan's skepticism about human faith in God—“*all that a man has will he give for his own life.*” But if Job followed such a course, it would produce disastrous results. It would undermine the very foundation of his faithful service.

Thomas Constable: She evidently concluded that God was not being fair with Job. He had lived a godly life, but God had afflicted rather than awarded him. She had the same

retributive view of the divine-human relationship that Job and his friends did, but she was "*foolish*" (v. 10, spiritually ignorant, not discerning). Her frustration in seeing her husband suffer without being able to help him or to understand his situation undoubtedly aggravated her already raw emotions. She too had lost all of her children. She gives evidence in the text of being bitter toward God. Had she been simply anxious that Job's suffering would end, she probably would not have urged him to abandon his upright manner of life by cursing God.

C. (:10a) Patient Response of Job

"But he said to her, 'You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' "

Elmer Smick: Job's reply is remarkable in the compassion he shows toward his wife and in his total acceptance of God's will for his life (v.10). He may have accused his wife of blasphemy but chose to accept it as a statement of desperation. Her "*talking like a foolish woman*" does not refer to intellectual foolishness but to religious apostasy as in **Psalms 14:1** and **53:1**, where "*the fool [nābāl; GK 5572] says in his heart, 'There is no God.'*" To curse God is essentially a way of denying he is God. Job is willing to believe that his wife is only talking like a blasphemer. Job's wisdom, however, is to receive with meekness whatever prosperity or disaster God might send. Such wisdom is not rooted in his intellectual capacity but in his fear (worship) of God.

D. (:10b) Passing the Second Test by Maintaining His Integrity

"In all this Job did not sin with his lips."

John Hartley: The outcome of this state of Job's trial is succinctly stated: In all this Job did not sin with his lips. The lips express a person's deepest thoughts (cf. **Prov. 18:4**). Consequently when one strives for moral purity they are the hardest member to bring under control. They are obstinate to discipline. That is why the Wisdom tradition taught that the one who controls his speech has his whole life in focus (**Prov. 13:3; 21:23**; cf. **Jas. 3:2**). Therefore to say that Job did not sin with his lips is to state unequivocally that Job did not commit the slightest error. Whereas God had declared prior to this testing that Job was without sin, this statement asserts that Job had come thus far through his trial unscathed by any wrongdoing.

Trevor Longman: How are we to understand **Job's innocence**? It is not some kind of abstract perfection. Job has his faults. As **Wilson** puts it, "Israelite faith assumed the sinful nature of humans." Rather, his argument (which will be presented in the disputation section and is one the author of the book accepted as legitimate and powerful) is that he does not deserve the level of punishment that he experiences. He has sinned a little, and God has gone over the top in his punishment. And he is right. If he is being punished for his sins, God is unfair. However, by presenting the case of Job, the author is undermining the whole concept of retribution theology.

III. (:11-13) INTRODUCTION OF JOB'S THREE FRIENDS AS THEY PROVIDE SILENT SUPPORT

A. (:11) Commitment to Comfort

“Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.”

David Clines: This scene, of the arrival of the friends, forms a bridge between the prologue proper and the dialogue. The friends will be Job's conversation partners throughout the dialogue, and will remain on stage, though silent toward the end, right through to the epilogue. But they do not appear in the prologue until the transactions of heaven with earth have been completed; they are mere commentators on events that have transpired.

Robert Alden: They started as **friends**, but before the debates were over, Job used less-than-friendly words to describe them. Throughout this commentary these three will be called “*friends*” because that is the word in the text at this point. Though not an ideal term, it certainly is better than “*comforters*” (cf. **16:2**). These three probably were wealthy sheiks like Job. They had the time to talk for what may have been several months with their suffering comrade. Nothing is told about their families or stations in life. They seem to have come from a distance, yet they apparently spoke the same language and drew their illustrations and observations from the same common pool of experiences that Job had.

Tremper Longman: They come to Job as a **group** even though they departed from different locations (“*they consulted together*”). The significance of this observation is that they really act as a team rather than as individuals in the dialogues that follow. They represent not three different viewpoints but a common viewpoint as they stand united over against what they perceive to be Job's presumption.

B. (:12) Weeping over Job's Wretched Condition

“And when they lifted up their eyes at a distance, and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe, and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.”

David Thompson: When you are really low, you will see who your friends really are. It is easy to be a backslapping friend when everything is sailing along, but real friendship develops in the trenches of trials and struggles.

Notice their reaction:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| (Reaction #1) - They loudly wept. | 12:12a |
| (Reaction #2) - They humbly worshipped. | 12:12b |
| (Reaction #3) - They quietly sat with him. | 12:13 |

These friends quietly sat at Job's side for seven days and seven nights. They were good friends who just wanted to be with Job. Sometimes the best thing you can do is just be there and keep your mouth shut.

C. (:13) Spending Time with Job in Sorrowful Silence

"Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great."

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

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

Francis Andersen: Attention is focused, not on the abstract mystery of evil, not on the moral question of undeserved suffering, but on one man's physical existence in bodily pain. There was nothing to be said. These wise men are horrified and speechless. They were true friends, bringing to Job's lonely ash-heap the compassion of a silent presence.

John Hartley: The seven-day period functions as a turning point in the dramatic action of the account. The atmosphere was tense. Nobody spoke. Job's pain was visibly unbearable. Then like a thunderclap Job's lament broke the silence.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is there some aspect of your possessions or health that you cannot be denied without striking out at God?
- 2) How can your spouse be an encouragement or a source of temptation in time of trial?
- 3) Do you show up in person when your friends are suffering?
- 4) How can you prepare now to face the future reality of suffering?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Atkinson: First, chapters 1 to 2 ‘put out of court the view that all suffering must be due to sin’. We, the readers, know that Job was not being punished for his sins. Sometimes, of course, the Bible indicates that suffering is due to sin. Miriam is struck with leprosy for hers. A failure to partake of the Holy Communion in an appropriately worthy and prepared manner is understood to be the cause of some people’s weakness and illness in Corinth. But again and again in the Bible, and nowhere more clearly than in the book of Job, we are warned against making too easy an equation between a person’s suffering and their own sins. **Jones** rightly says that ‘as a complete answer to explain every situation of suffering, the punitive concept of suffering is invalid’.

Secondly, it is also clearly wrong to imagine, as Job’s friends later do, that Job is being disciplined so that he may learn the error of his ways. Twice we are told of God’s view of Job: that he was ‘blameless and upright’. This prepares us for the assessment we will have to make of his friends’ contributions in the next chapters. It also rules out the thought that Job’s character is somehow being purified through his sufferings.

Thirdly, even though the book makes plain that good and upright people do suffer in this world without any apparent reason to account for it, the prologue, and indeed the rest of the book of Job, point us to the view that the outcome of such suffering will be a deeper relationship between the sufferer and God.

So, fourthly, the prologue invites us to place the problem of innocent suffering in a wider context. There are larger issues here than the question of suffering, serious though that is. How is a person to maintain faith in God in the face of suffering? That is the broader religious context of this book, the deeper issue at stake. We are being prepared here in the prologue not only to face the questions of suffering, but also to see them in the larger framework of Job’s relationship with God.

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

Meredith Kline: Satan seduced Adam even while Adam was standing in the integrity of his creation righteousness. From this it might have appeared that Satan could trip up the depraved sons of Adam at will and trample upon them. But herein lies a great wonder of redemptive grace: sinner Job stands triumphant where righteous Adam tragically fell! Thus, for the confounding of Satan and the reassurance of the saints, the Lord gave clear proof that a righteousness more enduring than that of Adam was being provided through the second Adam. This triumph of Job’s patience over the

Adversary's malice provided a seal, especially for the ages before the Incarnation, of God's promise that He would bestow on the faithful the gift of eternal salvation through the Christ to come.

David Thompson: WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES A FAITHFUL BELIEVER, HE WILL CONTINUE TO TRUST GOD AND HIS GREAT SOVEREIGNTY EVEN IF THOSE CLOSE TO HIM REACT IN ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT AND NEGATIVE WAYS.

There are four different responses that take place to the horrible satanic things that hit Job:

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|--|----------------|
| RESPONSE #1 – The physical response of Job. | 2:8 |
| RESPONSE #2 – The emotional response of Job's wife. | 2:9 |
| RESPONSE #3 – The theological response of Job to his wife. | 2:10 |
| RESPONSE#4 – The emotional response of Job's friends. | 2:11-13 |

Cyril Barber: quoting **Dr. Horatius Bonar** –

*I dare not choose my lot,
I would not if I might,
Choose Thou for me, my God,
So shall I walk aright . . .*

*Take Thou my cup and it
With joy or sorrow fill,
As best to Thee may seem,
Choose Thou for me my good and ill . . .*

*Choose Thou for me my friends,
My sickness or my health,
Choose Thou my cares for me,
My poverty or wealth. . .*

*Not mine – not mine, the choice,
In things both great and small,
Be Thou my Guide, my Strength,
My wisdom and my all.*

TEXT: Job 3:1-26

TITLE: INITIAL COMPLAINT OF JOB – 3 DEATH WISHES

BIG IDEA:

WHEN TRANQUILITY ERUPTS INTO UNRELENTING TURMOIL OUR TROUBLED SPIRIT CAN STRENUOUSLY COMPLAIN

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: In this speech we are suddenly plunged out of the epic grandeur and deliberateness of the prologue into the dramatic turmoil of the poetry, from the external description of suffering to Job's inner experience. This beautiful and affecting poem is built upon a dynamic movement from the past to the future and from the experience of the man Job outwards to the experience of humankind. There is first a curse on the days of his conception and birth (vv 3–10), then, since that must inevitably fail, a wish that he had died at birth (vv 11–19), and finally the question why suffering humanity cannot be relieved of its suffering by an early death (vv 20–26).

John Hartley: Job curses the day of his birth (vv. 3a, 4–5) and the night of his conception (vv. 3b, 6–7) as a single entity. For that reason he entreats the greatest wizards (v. 8) to keep light from giving life to that day (vv. 8–9) and allowing his birth (v. 10). The motivation for his curse lies in the agonizing questions about his being allowed to live in order to experience such pain (vv. 11–12) and not experience the peaceful rest similar to God's on the seventh day of creation (v. 13). . .

It should be noted that in his desire for death Job never entertains the option of suicide. Suicide was not acceptable for the person of faith, because it signified that one had lost all hope in God. Having this strong conviction, Job can seek relief from his pain in death only through having the day of his birth removed from time or prompting God to send him to Sheol.

John MacArthur: Job was in deep pain and despair. What God was allowing hurt desperately, but while Job did not curse God (cf. 2:8), he did curse his birth (vv. 10, 11). He wished he had never been conceived (v. 3) or born because the joys of his life were not worth all the pain. He felt it would have been better to have never lived than to suffer like that; better to have never had wealth than to lose it; better to have never had children than to have them all killed. He never wanted his birthday remembered, and wished it had been obliterated from the calendar (vv. 4-7).

Elmer Smick: The spiritual tone of Job's life has changed dramatically here. The man of patience and faith sinks into a state of despondency and spiritual depression, so frequently a major problem to those who endure severe physical illness or impairment. In **chapter 3** Job establishes an attitude that largely colors all he says in the succeeding chapters. In all his many words of despair, nowhere will he come closer to cursing God

to his face (2:5) than here in **chapter 3**, where he sounds more like the grumblers in the wilderness described in the book of Numbers than the psalmists who approach God with their laments. By cursing the day of his birth, he is questioning the sovereign wisdom of his Creator. At this point the drama is intense, for the Accuser, whom we will never see again, seems to have triumphed. Whether he has or not will be determined by what follows.

David Atkinson: Now we are taken inside Job's heart and made to feel his anguish. The cause of his pain is not so much his loss or his bereavement, his illness or his wife's tempting words. It is much more the absence and silence of God which troubles him now. Here is humanity's protest against the ways of God. Here Job is trying desperately to get his experience and his faith together. He is attempting to allow his faith to interpret his shocking experience. He cannot understand what has happened – what God has allowed to happen. What God is doing hurts desperately. But Job holds on in despairing faith that God is none the less a God of integrity, justice and truth.

Tremper Longman: Besides the Psalms and the grumbling tradition of Numbers, we might fruitfully compare **Job 3** to Jeremiah's laments. Jeremiah sounds a lot like Job when he curses the day of his birth: [**Jer. 20:14-18**]

In spite of the similarity here, there is basic dissimilarity in that Jeremiah is speaking to God and not about him. Clearly, Jeremiah is conflicted in his speech to God, going back and forth between complaint and confidence, but still all his prayer is addressed to God.

Francis Andersen: In the first speech the spectacle of human misery is presented with a poignancy that is quite overwhelming. Job is stunned because he cannot deny that it is the Lord who has done all this to him. Even more piteous than his question 'Why?', which the best answers of his friends cannot satisfy, is his desperate need to find again his lost Friend. Under these conditions, the friends can hardly be blamed, even though their well-meaning efforts aggravate Job's troubles more than they calm him (**16:2**). For only the Lord himself, in the end, can heal Job's innermost mind. It is not that he answers the questions better than the friends; he does not seem to answer them at all. But after he has spoken, Job has altogether left behind the questions.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB SPEAKS AND CURSES HIS BIRTH

“Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.”

Elmer Smick: The words “*After this*” (v.1), which typically mark a literary transition (**Ge 15:14** [NIV, “*afterward*”]; **23:19**; **25:26**), introduce the Dialogue, a major division of the book. In fact, the entire third chapter, though a part of the Dialogue (in that it evokes a response from the three friends), is **transitional**.

David Clines: Job's “*opening his mouth*” first is a narrative hint that the speech cycles are to be construed as responses of the friends to Job, not responses of Job to the friends (we shall note that the narrator shows us Elihu as regarding the friends' speeches as

“answers,” 32:3, 5). They have come to “comfort” him (2:11), and at times that is what he understands to be their purpose (16:2; 21:34), however ineffectually it may be carried out. But all the real progress in the drama is made by Job, and he **challenges** the friends much more than they comfort him.

I. (:2-10) THE WISH THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN

A. (:2-3) Curse on the Day and Night of His Birth

1. Curse on the Day of His Birth

“And Job said, 3 ‘Let the day perish on which I was to be born,’ ”

2. Curse on the Night of His Birth

“And the night which said, ‘A boy is conceived.’ ”

Elmer Smick: He **personifies** both the night of his conception and the day he was born.

David Clines: The point of this first stanza is to utter the vain wish that he had never been born. It is a vain wish and the curses it includes are inconsequential and ineffective because it is too late to do anything about it. . .

Strictly speaking, this is not a curse, but a wish or malediction, directed essentially against the two events that made his life possible, his conception and birth, and directed on the verbal level against the “day” and “night” when those events occurred. It is part of the surrealism of the wish that its object is the “perishing,” not of the conditions of his existence, but of the conditions for the conditions of his existence. Job is not someone to settle for half-measures (**Weiser**); he would like to root up his present life out of the world, carrying with it the causes of it, the moments of his conception and birth, and along with them the very calendrical time that made them possible.

B. (:4-5) Curse on the Day of His Birth

*“May that day be darkness;
Let not God above care for it,
Nor light shine on it.
5 Let darkness and black gloom claim it;
Let a cloud settle on it;
Let the blackness of the day terrify it.”*

C. (:6-9) Curse on the Night of His Birth

1. (:6) Let It be Dark

*“As for that night, let darkness seize it;
Let it not rejoice among the days of the year;
Let it not come into the number of the months.”*

2. (:7) Let It be Barren and Joyless

*“Behold, let that night be barren;
Let no joyful shout enter it.”*

3. (:8) Let It be Cursed and Chaotic

*“Let those curse it who curse the day,
Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan.”*

Izak Cornelius: In the ancient Near East the Leviathan is the primeval sea monster of chaos defeated at creation. It represents the raging floodwaters that can be destructive (**22:16**), and if it is aroused as part of a curse, it means that chaos will prevail. Such a magical technique may be reflected in later Jewish-Aramaic incantations.

4. (:9) Let It be Dark

*“Let the stars of its twilight be darkened;
Let it wait for light but have none,
Neither let it see the breaking dawn;”*

D. (:10) **Reason for His Curse**

*“Because it did not shut the opening of my mother's womb,
Or hide trouble from my eyes.”*

John Hartley: The metaphor of shutting the doors of a womb is used both for preventing conception (**Gen. 29:31**) and for keeping an embryo from coming forth to life (**Job 38:8**). If this metaphor goes with the night of conception, the shut womb means that he would not have been conceived (**1 Sam. 1:5; cf. Gen. 16:2; 20:18**). But if it refers to the day of birth, it means that he would have been stillborn. Either way Job would not have experienced the trauma of leaving the warm, comfortable environment of his mother's womb to experience the trouble (*‘āmāl*) that has befallen him in the world of light.

II. (:11-19) **THE WISH THAT HE HAD DIED AT BIRTH**

David Clines: vv. 11-19 -- In this second stanza we find no longer maledictions, but a lament. The malediction is given up because it is futile; it doesn't alter the fact, Job is alive, and his life is turmoil (**Driver**). Unlike the typical OT “lament” (**Klage**), however, whose function is appeal, this lament sets its heart not on some improvement of the sufferer's lot, but on the dissolution of his life (**Fohrer**). Developing his theme forward in time from the moments of vv 3–10, Job asks why, if his conception and birth could not have been prevented, he could not have died so soon as he was born. Then he should have had “*rest*” and “*quiet*” (v 13), the opposite of the **turmoil** that now engulfs him—which is the theme that will be picked up finally by the third stanza as it draws to its close (v 26). So filled is his mind with this single thought that he can disregard “not only the long years of happiness that he had previously enjoyed, but also the drearier aspects of Sheol, which elsewhere he could vividly portray” (**Driver**). **Davidson** well observes on these lines: “The picture of the painless stillness of death fascinates him and he dwells long on it, counting over with a minute particularity all classes, kings and

prisoners, slaves and masters, small and great, who there drink deep of a common peace, escaping the unquietness of life.”

Elmer Smick: vv. 11-26 -- Job continues his pitiable complaint with a series of **rhetorical questions**. There is a **progression** in his thought. Since the day of his birth did happen (v.10), the next possibility is a stillbirth (vv.11–12, 16). But since he is alive, he longs for a premature death (vv.20, 23). In vv.13–19 Job conceives of death as falling into restful sleep (v.13). It is clear that he does not consider it annihilation. The dead are in a place where there is no activity, where everyone finds rest; even the wicked stop making trouble there (v.17).

A. (:11-12) Why Not Die Right After Being Born

“Why did I not die at birth, Come forth from the womb and expire?

12 Why did the knees receive me, And why the breasts, that I should suck?”

Francis Andersen: At this point Job’s speech changes from cursing to questioning. There is a progression of thought. He wishes he had not been conceived; or, if conceived, that he had died in the womb; or, if not that, that he had not been born; or, if born, that he had died at once; or, since he has grown to maturity, that he might die soon.

David Clines: It is uncertain whether the knees that received the newborn child were the mother’s or the father’s knees.

B. (:13-15) Death Viewed as the Entrance into the Leveling Field of Rest

1. (:13) Desirability of Rest and Tranquility

“For now I would have lain down and been quiet;

I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,”

John Hartley: The intensity of his longing for rest is indicated by the use of four different terms: lie down (*šākab*), quiet (*šāqat*), sleep (*yāšēn*), and rest (*nūaḥ*). Perfect rest is the goal of Job’s curse-lament, for v. 13 is reiterated in v. 26.

Francis Andersen: In spite of the vagueness with which the living conditions of Sheol are described, the continuation of conscious personal existence and identity after death is clearly believed. The book knows nothing about the heaven of bliss or the hell of torment in later eschatology, but there is never a thought that death means extinction. In fact, Job provides a long list of the denizens of Sheol, ranging from those who had achieved the highest eminence (kings and others, **verse 14**) to those who had achieved nothing (the stillborn, verse 16). He envies them all, for nothing happens in the grave.

2. (:14) Destiny of the Highest Achievers

“With kings and with counselors of the earth,

Who rebuilt ruins for themselves;”

John Hartley: The meaning of **ruins** (*hōrābôt*) is disputed. Some (e.g., **Davidson, Horst, Gordis**) take it to refer to cities or other great monuments lying in severe disrepair (cf. **Isa. 44:26; 58:12**). Frequently a great leader promoted his greatness by rebuilding a famous ruin. By such a deed he extended his authority over that which an enemy had subjugated, even over a place inhabited by evil spirits. Others think ruins refers to the **monumental tombs** that kings and princes built as their resting place in death. These tombs are called ruins because they were usually left unattended and slowly deteriorated. In support of taking ruins as tombs is the parallel term houses in **v. 15b** (cf. **17:13; 30:23; Eccl. 12:5**, where “*house*” stands for Sheol) and the use of this word in association with “*the pit*,” the realm of the dead, in **Ezek. 26:20**. In that case Job is alluding particularly to the motivation that inspired the building of them; i.e., it was believed that the inhabitants of these monuments, regardless of their state of disrepair, had a more peaceful existence in death than the masses who were living. To enhance their existence after death these rich, powerful leaders filled their tombs with valuable objects, including gold and silver. Along this line many postulate that Job has in mind the great pyramids around which the nobles built smaller pyramid-like tombs to ensure a place in the afterlife for themselves. Lamentingly Job longs for that kind of rest.

3. (:15) Destiny of the Wealthiest Princes

*“Or with princes who had gold,
Who were filling their houses with silver.”*

C. (:16) Why Not Die in the Womb

*“Or like a miscarriage which is discarded,
I would not be, As infants that never saw light.”*

D. (:17-19) Death Viewed as Escape from Earthly Suffering

1. (:17) No More Affliction

*“There the wicked cease from raging,
And there the weary are at rest.”*

Robert Alden: This and the next two verses list more categories of those who are **happier dead than alive**: the wicked, the weary, the captives, and the slaves. It is first “*the wicked*” who enjoy an end to their “*trouble/rage/ turmoil/agitation*.” While it could refer to the trouble that the wicked cause others, it refers more likely to the unhappy and fear-filled lives that the wicked lead. “*Weary*” translates a redundant expression, “*wearied of strength*,” a combination of two well-established words that never appear elsewhere joined like this. Occasionally, one hears tired or troubled Christians say that they are going to sleep for the first century they are in heaven. Job, too, anticipated an afterlife where toil would cease.

2. (:18) No More Oppression

*“The prisoners are at ease together;
They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.”*

3. (:19) No More Distinctions

*“The small and the great are there,
And the slave is free from his master.”*

Francis Andersen: chiasmic pattern that unifies verses 14–19:

- A Privileged (verses 14–15)
 - B Underprivileged (verses 17–18)
 - B’ ‘small’/‘slave’
- A’ ‘great’/‘master’

Robert Alden: The section ends with a merismus, “*the small and the great*,” and a repetition of the idea of v. 18, freedom for the slave. Job had been great; now he was small. Regardless, death levels all. “All corpses look alike,” and “Shrouds have no pockets,” the rabbis said. “*Death is the destiny of every man*,” said **Qoheleth** (**Ecc** 7:2). On this depressing note the section ends, but Job had not yet finished his bitter and biting lament.

III. (:20-26) THE WISH THAT HE COULD DIE NOW

A. (:20-22) Questioning God’s Blessings of Life and Light

1. (:20) Light and Life Do Not Adequately Compensate for Suffering

*“Why is light given to him who suffers,
And life to the bitter of soul;”*

2. (:21-22) Longing for Death

a. (:21) Value of Death

*“Who long for death, but there is none,
And dig for it more than for hidden treasures;”*

b. (:22) Rejoicing over Death

*“Who rejoice greatly,
They exult when they find the grave?”*

B. (:23-24) Questioning the Paradox of God’s Providential Ways

1. (:23) Gives Light of Life but Darkness of Experience

*“Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden,
And whom God has hedged in?”*

John Hartley: Light and life, God’s greatest gifts to any person, only serve to increase Job’s despair beyond measure.

2. (:24) Gives Sustenance but only Sustains My Pain and Suffering

*“For my groaning comes at the sight of my food,
And my cries pour out like water.”*

C. (:25-26) Reason for His Lament

1. (:25) Realizing His Worst Fears

*“For what I fear comes upon me,
And what I dread befalls me.”*

2. (:26) Restricted to Unrelenting Turmoil

*“I am not at ease, nor am I quiet,
And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.”*

John Hartley: A person with a deep sense of serenity may enjoy life to its fullest. Conversely, one lacking repose is filled with deep agitation, which encompasses physical torment, agony of mind, and social discomfort. Such is Job’s case. He exclaims, turmoil comes! The word for **turmoil** (*rōḡez*; cf. v. 17) describes the agitated state that results from complete lack of peace.

Elmer Smick: The very thing he dreads the most has happened. It thus appears to him that the very God who put a hedge of protection and blessing about him (1:10) has subsequently hemmed him in with trouble and distress (vv.23c, 26).

David Clines: What is it that Job has dreaded and that has now come upon him (v 25)? **Andersen** answers, “the loss of God’s favour,” which is true, but not what Job says. **Habel** replies, “his suffering,” which is nearer the mark, but not yet precisely Job’s point. The present verse is the answer: it is loss of ease, of quiet, of restfulness; it is the **advent of turmoil**. Reading the prologue again, we are impressed by the tranquility of the portrayal of Job’s condition before disaster struck. There is a tidy inevitability about the prosperity that flowed from his piety, and a decent regularity about the partying of Job’s children and his picking up the tab for any delinquency of theirs. But now his worst fear has been realized: order has descended into chaos and therewith tranquility into turmoil.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you explain the dramatic contrast between how Job responded to his trials in the first 2 chapters and this complaint and lament of chapter 3?
- 2) Since rest and tranquility are not guaranteed in this life, how much more should we praise God when we are not embroiled in turmoil and suffering?
- 3) Can this passage be used as support for conscious existence after physical death?
- 4) Are you able to turn to God in your darkest hours knowing that He has not abandoned you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: These are the **harshest words** Job utters against himself in the entire book. They startle us. The friends too are shocked. They fear that his faith in God has melted into distrust (e.g., 4:5–6). Why would one who refused to curse God be so hostile toward his own life? The contrast between the Job of the prologue and the Job of the poem could not be sharper. The former Job “*did not sin or charge God with wrong*” (1:22), but this Job verbalizes his bitterest feelings.

Did Job sin in uttering a curse on his own life? Since life is God’s greatest gift to a human being, a curse on it would not only deny that gift but would also speak against God himself. But if Job had sinned in his first speech, there would be no debate. His frequent claims of innocence would be sheer mockeries. Though Job approaches the brink of cursing God, he does not. Instead he vents the venom of his anguish by wishing that he were dead. He survives his darkest hour, since he neither curses God nor takes his fate into his own hands.

David Atkinson: What we know of God and his goodness, and what we do not know about the mystery of God’s heavenly purposes are here in headlong collision. There is an unbearable tension. ‘This is the depth and essence of the suffering of the suffering Job.’ Job knows that his life is in the hands of God, and is lived in the faith that God is a good God. But in his actual experiences of life recently, he finds it impossible to see in what sense God has in fact got his well-being in mind. In all his overwhelming misfortunes he is sure that he is still in touch with God, but it is not the God he thought he knew. The God he is now experiencing seems more like an enemy than a friend, more like darkness than light. God is now *Deus absconditus*, **the hidden God**, whose presence is known only in the darkness of his absence. Can this still be the same God that he has served all these years? To quote **Barth** again, ‘He does not doubt for a moment that he has to do with this God. But it almost drives him mad that he encounters him in a form in which he is absolutely alien.’ **What has God become for him?** – that is where the book of Job has brought us now.

David Clines: The **nodal** verse of this chapter should be identified as **v 26**: it contains in both positive and negative form the dominant image of the poem, the presence of “turmoil” and the absence of “ease,” and as well it summarizes the stance of Job, as a distressed sufferer pure and simple and not as one who has been drawing intellectual and theological inferences from his suffering.

The **tonality** of the poem is determined also by the primary image; though the theme of the poem is death and the desire for death, nevertheless the image of restlessness rather than, say, of resignation advises the reader that this cannot be Job’s last word and prepares us for further developments of Job’s quest for order and orientation. The man says he wishes he were dead; but with such violence (especially **vv 3–9**) that the reader’s expectations of impending action and controversy are stimulated. . .

The imagery is so precise and the psychological depiction so authentic that we may miss the **surprise** here. For if we consider the man Job, afflicted with some terrible skin disease, we might suppose for him feelings of irritability, sheer pain, disgust, or, as he reflects on the significance of his illness, self-pity, anger or hopelessness. And if we consider him as one who has lost his goods, honor, children, wife (to speak truly), we might suppose for him feelings of grief, loss, meaninglessness, futility, worthlessness. The last thing we would imagine for him is **anxiety** and **restlessness**. For it seems, from our perspective, though not yet perhaps from his, that all that can befall him has befallen him and that the certainty of his present state has become all too evident. Restlessness, even anxiety, emerges (does it not?) from a state where good and bad, fear and hope, are mixed. What has Job to hope for now, or what to fear? His death? Here he welcomes death as the most desirable state, and when he next opens his mouth it will be to voice his desire that God would crush him to death, let loose his hand and cut him off (**6:8–9**); it is hard to believe that here the fear of death is the focus of this pervasive mood of restlessness. Rather, we should regard the anxiety as arising from the **intellectual-existential significance of what has happened to him**. The suffering and the loss is one thing, but it is not on the same level as the mind-blowing and foundation-shaking threat that the exceptional suffering of the exceptionally pious poses to notions of cosmic order, divine justice and human values.

Derek Thomas: Job asks a series of pointed, sharp questions in this book:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| Why didn't you let me die at birth? | (3:11). |
| Why didn't you dry up my mother's breasts so that I would starve? | (3:12). |
| Why do you keep wretched people like me alive? | (3:20-22). |
| How do you expect me to have hope and patience? | (6:12). |
| If life is so short, does it have to be miserable, too? | (7:1-10). |
| Why don't you stop hurting me for a while? | (7:17-19). |
| What did I ever do to you that I became the target for your arrows? | (7:20). |
| Why don't you forgive me before I die and it's too late? | (7:21). |
| How can mortal man be righteous before a holy God? | (9:2). |
| Why do you favour the wicked? | (9:24). |
| Since you have already decided I'm guilty, why should I even try? | (9:29). |
| You are the one who created me, so why are you destroying me? | (10:8). |

Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy? (13:24).

Why do you not let me meet you somewhere face to face so that I can state my case?
(23:3-6).

Why do you not set a time to judge wicked men? (24:1).

God was not threatened in any way by Job's questions. But did Job find any answers? Just this one: that God will be glorified, no matter what, and the sooner we knuckle under and submit to it, the better it will be for our souls and peace of mind.

Cyril Barber: Job was confused. His formula for life had seemingly failed him. He was at his wit's end. **Antoinette Wilson** knew what this was like and penned her famous poem "Wit's End Corner" to offer hope to those who are baffled by their suffering.

*Are you standing at Wit's-End Corner,
Christian with troubled brow?
Are you thinking of what is before you,
And all you are bearing now?
Does all the world seem against you,
And you in the battle alone?
Remember — at Wit's-End Corner
Is just where God's power is shown.*

*Are you standing at Wit's-End Corner
Blinded with wearying pain,
Feeling you cannot endure it,
You cannot bear the strain?
Bruised through the constant suffering,
Dizzy and dazed and dumb?
Remember — at Wit's-End Corner
Is where Jesus loves to come.*

*Are you standing at Wit's-End Corner
Your work before you spread,
All lying begun, unfinished,
And pressing on heart and head,
Longing for strength to do it,
Stretching out trembling hands?
Remember — at Wit's-End Corner
The Burden-bearer stands.*

*Are you standing at Wit's-End Corner?
Then you're just in the very spot
To learn the wondrous resources
Of Him who faileth not.
No doubt, to a brighter pathway*

*Your footsteps will soon be moved.
But only at Wit's-End Corner
Is the " God who is able " proved.*

Job was at his wit's end. He could not understand why one misfortune after another descended upon him. He also did not know of Satan's involvement behind the scenes, and he [Job] did not know that he was being used by God as an example of unjust suffering.

TEXT: Job 4:1 – 5:27

TITLE: *ELIPHAZ: YOUR SUFFERING IS THE RESULT OF YOUR SIN*

BIG IDEA:

INSENSITIVE COUNSELORS WRONGLY APPLY THEIR LIMITED THEOLOGY IN HURTFUL WAYS (LIMITING GOD'S GOVERNANCE OF HIS UNIVERSE)

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: In the first cycle the friends clearly state their positions. Eliphaz posits that no human being is righteous before God; Bildad argues that God never perverts justice; Zophar holds that God assuredly punishes every evildoer. All of them exhort Job to seek God that he might again enjoy a prosperous life. Although they wish to console Job, they are so chagrined at the severity of his misfortune that they feel they must reprimand him for some wrong he certainly must have committed. In his responses Job laments his suffering and begins his search for some way to gain reconciliation with God. In this cycle his responses have two basic divisions; in the first division he interacts with his friends, and in the second he addresses God with a lament. As this cycle moves along Job becomes increasingly disappointed in the friends' counsel and searches more earnestly for some way to win an acquittal from God, his Judge. . .

Eliphaz's central premise is that everyone is guilty of error. From this premise he derives two basic arguments. First, he boldly articulates the law of retribution, i.e., that the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer hardship in this life and face a premature death (4:7–21). Second, he lauds God's greatness and his compassionate care in delivering his own from sorrow (5:9–26). Loss and suffering are not a final tragedy, for God will rescue anyone who is repentant from their grip and he will bestow an abundance of blessings. Therefore, misfortune presents an opportunity for the afflicted to discover hidden errors and to seek God's compassion through contrition.

Derek Kidner: Essentially, Eliphaz's contribution is this: "You are a good man, Job. So do not lose heart about this matter. You are being disciplined because there are some things in your life that need to be sorted out. Bear with this patiently, for it will all turn out right in the end."

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz speaks first. Presumably he is the leader of the friends, probably the senior member. In his first speech, among other things, Eliphaz clearly states the basic argument of the friends as they, as sages, try to help Job navigate his problem. Quite simply, **suffering is the result of sin** (4:6–11; 5:2–7). There is therefore only one solution to suffering, including Job's, and that is repentance (5:8–16). After all, God will bless those he disciplines through suffering (5:17–23). Indeed, such people will live in safety (5:24–27). Eliphaz appeals to the authority of experience

(5:8) as well as to spiritual, perhaps even divine, revelation (4:12–17). On the other hand, no one, not even an angel, will take Job's side in the matter (5:1). And in any case, God does not trust angels, not to speak of humans (4:18–21), who after all are "*born for trouble*" (5:6–7).

Francis Andersen: We should call attention immediately to a feature in the construction of Eliphaz's speech which will be met several times in other parts of the book. In the overall structure of his discourse, which is a single piece, we should not look for the introduction of a theme at the beginning, its development along a straight line of thought with the proof at the end, followed, if necessary, by the practical application to Job's need. Such logical neatness is not found. Instead there is a **symmetrical introverted structure** with the basis of the argument in the centre, and with theoretical development before and after it. The advice that emerges from this doctrine is embodied in two balancing blocks, which, although separated in space, constitute the sum of Eliphaz's exhortation.

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

Cyril Barber: Eliphaz' personal counsel was based almost entirely upon observation (5:2–27), and this minimized the value of his advice (5:8–16), reduced the value of his appeal (5:17–20), and made his personal promise of little worth (5:21–26).

(:1) PROLOGUE – OPENING COUNSEL FROM ELIPHAZ

"Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,"

David Thompson: He was from Teman, a place, according to Jeremiah, that was one time supposedly known for its wisdom (**Jer. 49:7**). Eliphaz was probably the oldest of the friends (**15:10**), and with age is supposed to be some wisdom. As we analyze Eliphaz' first response to Job, there are seven things to observe:

- 1) Eliphaz truly cares about Job.
- 2) Eliphaz truly knows much about God.
- 3) Eliphaz is very sincere in what he says.
- 4) Eliphaz is very emotional about the situation.
- 5) Eliphaz says what he truly believes.
- 6) Eliphaz says many things which are true.
- 7) Eliphaz does not say what is **right** before God.

I. (4:2-5) MISGUIDED CONFRONTATION

A. (:2) Challenge of Job's Complaining Spirit – Listen to what I have to say

*“If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient?
But who can refrain from speaking?”*

Robert Alden: Two of the features just noted are evident in this opening segment of Eliphaz's first speech: **rebuke** and a good measure of **courtesy**. His speech seems almost apologetic, and one can almost picture his nervousness. After all, he and the other two had been sitting in silence with Job for seven days and seven nights. It is understandable that the first words would be gentle and cautious.

John Hartley: Eliphaz's first words reflect his own dilemma. Though he is apprehensive that Job may be irritated or wearied (*lā'ā*) by a response that challenges the value of his curse-lament, he feels compelled to speak lest Job's bitter words alienate God. With compassion for Job and yet aware that his own speech may add to his friend's burden, he politely asks Job's indulgence before offering a word.

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz begins on a relatively civil note. He asks whether Job would be discouraged if someone would “venture” a word with him. “Venture” (from *nsh*) means to put someone to the test. Eliphaz thus announces his intention to **challenge** Job's complaint. He does so reluctantly. He does not want to discourage Job, but he feels compelled to do so (“*who is able to restrain themselves from speaking*”). Job's words threaten Eliphaz's fundamental understanding of who God is and how he acts in the world. Thus he cannot keep himself from speaking.

B. (:3-4) Commendation for Job's Strengthening of Others – You have helped others

*“Behold you have admonished many,
And you have strengthened weak hands.
4 Your words have helped the tottering to stand,
And you have strengthened feeble knees.”*

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz begins with **compliments**. Job has been a “strong” person of faith in the past. He has been a **wise man** who has instructed many who are “weak.” He has provided strength for the weak-kneed and helped those who stumbled. Eliphaz describes the role of the wise here. The wise are those who know how to navigate life. They avoid pitfalls and maximize success. If an obstacle comes their way, they know the quickest way out of the mess. Thus they are in a position to give advice to others who are not as intelligent in life skills as they are. They can help those who falter. . .

The debate between Job and his friends is really a debate about the question **Who is wise?** As the debate continues, such concessions to civility will give place to insult and open and direct attack.

John Hartley: Job has aided the weak, those with *feeble hands and shaking knees*. Drained of all their strength and courage, they must be assisted by someone stronger.

Job has performed this service willingly. He has encouraged their rehabilitation by providing emotional support. He does not stand aloof from the needy as though they are parasites wanting to get at his resources. Rather he gladly soils his elegant garments as he reaches out to help them.

David Clines: The symptoms of physical exhaustion, feeble hands and weak knees (v 4), almost invariably function in biblical literature as images of depression and loss of psychic energy or morale; see **2 Sam 4:1; Isa 13:7; Ezra 4:4; 2 Chr 15:7**; cf. **Ecclus 2:12**; Lachish ostrakon 6 (ANET, 322b) (weak hands); **Isa 35:3** (weak hands, stumbling knees); **Ezek 7:17; 21:12 [7]** (weak hands, knees turned to water); cf. **Ecclus 25:23**; and **Nah 2:11 [10]; Heb 12:12** (trembling knees); **Ps 109:24** (stumbling knees); **1QM 14.6** (tottering knees); contrast **Judg 9:24; 2 Sam 2:7; Jer 23:14** (strengthened hands).

C. (:5) Criticism of Job's Impatience in His Own Case – You lack insight into your own suffering

*“But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;
It touches you, and you are dismayed.”*

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz accuses Job of being the kind of person who is strong when things are going well, but if trouble comes, he crumbles. He turns from a man of clarity and insight into a confused bumbler.

Francis Andersen: Already there is the insinuation that Job is unable to apply to himself what he preached to others.

II. (4:6-11) MAIN MESSAGE = RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY – THE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIN AND SUFFERING -- YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

A. (:6-7) Argument Summarized

1. (:6) General Principle: Godliness Guarantees Prosperity
*“Is not your fear of God your confidence,
And the integrity of your ways your hope?”*

David Clines: Eliphaz fails to help Job because his theology does not allow for the reality of a Job, of a righteous man who has no longer any ground for confidence, whose reverent piety has led him only away from assurance and toward despair. The only help a Job can be offered is the possibility of living, at a time of loss of assurance and abandonment of hope for life and weal, still in the confidence of the reality of God's goodness and wisdom. Rational wisdom finds that position impossibly self-contradictory. Only the encounter with the unavoidable but mysterious God can give Job, or the readers of the book, a firmly grounded confidence that does not negate the confidence of which Eliphaz speaks, but extends it beyond school wisdom to the case history of humankind.

John Hartley: **Uprightness** should be the foundation of hope. Faith engenders hope, and hope gives buoyancy to life with the result that one joyfully pursues integrity in all areas of one's life. The fear associated with reverence prevents one's self-confidence from giving way to pride. The wholeness of such a faith should provide the one who serves God with the resolution to face every obstacle. This line is not to be taken as a sarcastic statement, but as a mild reproof; Eliphaz earnestly wants Job to avoid speaking so caustically, for he fears that such words will destroy Job's piety.

2. (:7) No Exceptions

*"Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?
Or where were the upright destroyed?"*

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz now states his most basic argument against Job: The innocent do not suffer, but the wicked, even the seemingly most powerful and dangerous, perish. In other words, Eliphaz here presents the retribution theology of the three friends for the first time in succinct form.

Robert Alden: For the first of many times the standard argument of the friends appears: there are certain rules by which the universe operates. These rules dictate that good comes to those who are righteous and bad comes to those who are wicked. Working backwards from effect to cause, it means that if people suffer, it is because they have sinned; and if they are blessed, it is because they have trusted and obeyed.

B. (:8-9) Argument Supported from Observing Agriculture

*"According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity
And those who sow trouble harvest it.
9 By the breath of God they perish,
And by the blast of His anger they come to an end."*

Tremper Longman: **Verse 8** uses an agricultural metaphor in order to make the point that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between evil actions and negative consequences. Those who plow iniquity (*'āwen*) and plant trouble (*'āmāl*) will harvest iniquity and trouble. **Proverbs 22:8** does offer as a general principle *"Those who sow iniquity will reap evil,"* but while this is true as a general principle, it is not universally true, despite Eliphaz's claim. As a general principle, the NT makes the same point: *"All who take the sword die by the sword"* (**Matt. 26:52** NEB). But again, in this life, this principle does not work out perfectly. Job, as the reader knows, is prime evidence of this.

C. (:10-11) Argument Supported from Observing the Animal Kingdom

*"The roaring of the lion and the voice of the fierce lion,
And the teeth of the young lions are broken.
11 The lion perishes for lack of prey,
And the whelps of the lioness are scattered."*

Tremper Longman: But according to Eliphaz, even though the wicked are like lions (strong, dangerous, frightening), they will be silenced. Their teeth that rend their prey will be broken. They will be hungry, without prey. They will be scattered. In other words, though the wicked appear strong, appearances are wrong. The strong will be destroyed because of their evil.

Roy Zuck: Eliphaz added that though lions are strong, their teeth can be broken, they can perish for lack of food, and their cubs can be scattered by a hunter. Similarly, this senior spokesman hinted, Job, who used to be strong (cf. vv. 3-4), was broken and his children lost. Lions (five different Heb. words are used for “lion” in vv. 10-11) deserve to suffer because they bring problems to people; so Job also deserved to suffer.

III. (4:12-21) MYSTERY REVELATION -- UNDERMINING JOB'S DISCONNECT BETWEEN HIS PURITY AND HIS SUFFERING

Tremper Longman: vv. 12-17 -- In the previous section (vv. 6-11), Eliphaz appealed to experience and observation to make his point that the wicked experience punishment for their evil. In the present section, he argues that he has gotten a word from the divine realm that supports this idea.

David Clines: The purpose of this remarkable and evocative passage is essentially to explain how, though the distinction between righteous and wicked is firm, the righteous can never be perfectly righteous, and therefore must expect to experience—at least to some small extent—the misfortunes of the wicked. Though the righteous will never “perish” in the sense of being cut off in their prime, nevertheless they do suffer—as Job is witness. Eliphaz elaborately impresses upon Job that the cause of such—temporary—suffering lies not in Job alone: all created beings, even heavenly creatures, share in imperfection. Since Job may not have realized this, in the absence of such experience as Eliphaz has had, Eliphaz at once excuses Job and instructs him (**Driver**).

This second section of Eliphaz’s speech falls into two parts:

- (1) a description of his nocturnal experience (**vv 12-16**);
- (2) its content and the inferences to be drawn from it (**vv 17-21**).

A. (:12-16) Private Communication

1. (:12) Secret Communication

*“Now a word was brought to me stealthily,
And my ear received a whisper of it.”*

Tremper Longman: The revelatory moment begins with subtlety. The “word” (*dābār*, which can also mean “message”) “stole” (from *ngb*) over to him. Like a robber it came by stealth, without warning, unexpectedly. Although there is no substantial connection with the description of Christ’s coming “as a thief in the night” (**1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3**), both phrases communicate the idea of **surprise**. The message (word)

did not come through loud and clear, but just a whisper, again a description that emphasizes mystery as well as secrecy or privacy.

Robert Alden: Having appealed to reason or tradition, Eliphaz tried a new tack. One cannot be certain whether Eliphaz really had the vision he described here or whether he fabricated it for the purpose of bolstering his presentation to Job. It is hard to argue with people who claim to have special revelation. Such people cannot be easily dissuaded of their convictions, even though it is obvious that the dream or vision often corroborates what they otherwise believe or want to do.

2. (:13-14) Scary Communication

*“Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,
When deep sleep falls on men,
14 Dread came upon me, and trembling,
And made all my bones shake.”*

3. (:15) Spiritual Communication

*“Then a spirit passed by my face;
The hair of my flesh bristled up.”*

4. (:16) Spoken Communication

*“It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance;
A form was before my eyes;
There was silence, then I heard a voice.”*

B. (:17-21) Pastoral Application

1. (:17) Ludicrous Claims to Innocence

*“Can mankind be just before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?”*

John Hartley: In anticipation of Job’s claim to innocence Eliphaz is saying that such a claim has no possibility of being true. From his viewpoint no one can make demands on his Creator based on his own worth or moral attainment. With this thesis the author artfully has Eliphaz anticipate the direction Job’s argument will take.

Francis Andersen: The thing is so obviously impossible, that the banality makes Eliphaz sound pretentious. And quite unfair; for Job has not questioned the ways of God, let alone claimed to be better than God. All he has done so far is to say how miserable he feels, how he wishes he were dead. Eliphaz is reading a lot into this to find implied criticism of God. The only fault he has seen in Job is weakness (**4:5**).

2. (:18-19) Lessons from the Fallibility of Angels

*“He puts no trust even in His servants;
And against His angels He charges error.
19 How much more those who dwell in houses of clay,*

*Whose foundation is in the dust,
Who are crushed before the moth!”*

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz now makes a major-to-minor argument. If God does not trust his angels, who are presumably closer to him and more powerful, then why would he trust human beings?

3. (:20-21) Limitations of Mortality

*“Between morning and evening they are broken in pieces;
Unobserved, they perish forever.
21 Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them?
They die, yet without wisdom.”*

Robert Alden: A human life is too brief to understand the ways of God. The most aged of us are immature, unenlightened, and ignorant of the ways of God. It is a depressing note but not unlike others that sound from the mouths of the other two friends as well as from Job.

John Hartley: When people despise God’s ways, *they die without wisdom*. The phrase *without wisdom* means that they have not gained insight into the spiritual values of life or into the reasons for human mortality. Because they have relied on their own reason in their efforts to bring glory to themselves, they die in ignorance of why such a fate has befallen them. Again the author has Eliphaz anticipate the path Job is going to take in seeking an answer from God about his plight. Here Eliphaz is discounting the possibility that anyone who experiences sudden tragedy can understand the reasons for his own ruin.

IV. (5:1-7) MAJOR DANGER – TROUBLE AHEAD FOR UNREPENTANT FOOLS

A. (:1) Heaven Turns a Deaf Ear

*“Call now, is there anyone who will answer you?
And to which of the holy ones will you turn?”*

David Clines: Eliphaz’s attitude toward Job has been made clear in the previous chapter: Job is essentially a righteous man, but—like any human (or angel; cf. **4:18**)—he has his faults and is suffering for them. Job’s goodness has long been evident (**4:3–4**), and his fear of God and personal integrity are rightful grounds for confidence that his suffering will not last for long (**4:6**). He may rest assured that he will never perish utterly, for every righteous person has found ultimate deliverance (**4:7**). However, Job shares the moral frailty of all created beings (**4:17–19**); so his sinfulness—not specified in this speech, but see on **22:6–9**—must be recompensed, and no appeal can get him off the hook of retributive justice.

John Hartley: Eliphaz develops the implication of the heavenly message by questioning Job about whom he might turn to for assistance in gaining a hearing with God.

B. (:2) Anger Kills the Foolish

*“For vexation slays the foolish man,
And anger kills the simple.”*

John Hartley: The hardened fool rejects all instruction; instead he quarrels in order to get his own way (**Prov. 1:7; 15:5**). Such behavior leads to an early death (**Prov. 10:8, 10, 14, 21**). Through this proverb Eliphaz is warning Job that his present distress, if unchecked, will kill him like a fool.

C. (:3-5) Foolishness Reaps Destruction

*“I have seen the foolish taking root,
And I cursed his abode immediately.
4 His sons are far from safety,
They are even oppressed in the gate, Neither is there a deliverer.
5 His harvest the hungry devour,
And take it to a place of thorns;
And the schemer is eager for their wealth.”*

John Hartley: This does not mean that he actually cursed the estate himself, but that he earnestly bade God to execute the curse entailed in that person’s wrongdoing. That is, believing that every wicked deed, even though it may bring initial prosperity, contains its own curse, Eliphaz wished to release the power of the curse contained in that fool’s deeds so that the curse would speedily work its ill against that fool’s entire estate (*nāweh*), including his family, servants, flocks, and crops.

D. (:6-7) Mankind Sparks Affliction

*“For affliction does not come from the dust,
Neither does trouble sprout from the ground,
7 For man is born for trouble,
As sparks fly upward.”*

David Clines: Everything since v 1 has been building up to this climax of an astounding and provocative generalization. It may be, to our mind, logically a little perverse to begin with a particular exemplification of the principle (v 2), to continue with an even more particular illustration of the principle (vv 3–5), to deny thereafter any alternative to the principle (v 6), and only finally to enunciate the principle itself (v 7). But the principle is so fundamental to Eliphaz’s whole outlook that it matters little to him by what devious route he finally achieves explicit statement of it.

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz argues that people’s troubles do not come out of thin air (from the dust/from the ground). They have a cause, and the previous section highlighted the cause as the irritation/jealousy of a fool. Eliphaz claimed to help the fool get his comeuppance by cursing him, but his most important point is that misery/trouble does not pop out of thin air.

John Hartley: Eliphaz continues to argue that punishment is not a part of the natural processes, but is an inevitable outworking of a person's sinful nature. Misfortune is not a capricious act of nature that befalls one at random, for hardship ['āwen] does not grow out of the dust, nor does trouble ['āmāl; cf. 3:10] sprout from the ground. **A person harvests what he sows.** Suffering and misfortune, then, are direct punishments for wrongdoing. In fact, man **engenders trouble.** During life everyone does things that yield trouble just as surely as sparks or flashes of lightning fly upward. Perhaps the point of the latter metaphor is that from birth, plagues from the netherworld fly forth to curse a person's life. Caught in the chain of sin-punishment from birth, no person can find release from that chain. To chafe against ill-fate is mere folly. Job, therefore, should not be so distressed—all are sinners destined to experience trouble.

Meredith Kline: 4:12 – 5:7 – Job had called in question the wisdom of God's providence. Eliphaz counters with the argument that fallen men, whether godly or ungodly, are deficient in wisdom and justice and, therefore, incompetent to criticize Providence (4:12-21). They are, moreover, justly subject to all the woes attending mortality (5:1-7).

V. (5:8-16) MAJESTIC DELIVERER

Robert Alden: **Appeal to the God of Justice (5:8-16).** These nine verses stress three features of God's governance of the universe:

- his sovereign control over the weather and the fortunes of humankind,
- his apprehension and punishment of wrongdoers, and
- his deliverance of the needy and oppressed.

Warren Wiersbe: This leads to an appeal from Eliphaz that Job seek God and commit himself to Him. The God who does wonders and cares for His creation will surely help Job if he humbles himself and confesses his sins. Job should see his trials as discipline from God to make him a better man (vv. 17-18), a theme that will later be taken up by Elihu.

A. (:8-9) Appeal to God for Help

*“But as for me, I would seek God,
And I would place my cause before God;
9 Who does great and unsearchable things,
Wonders without number.”*

Francis Andersen: So far Eliphaz's teaching has been rather gloomy. Now he tries to strike a more cheerful note. Faith in God delivers from pessimism.

David Clines: Having advised Job that appeal for deliverance from his affliction is futile (v 1), since his suffering is his own fault (v 7) and must therefore be endured, what can Eliphaz now say that is more positive? He can only testify to what he himself does: *“I myself pray to God and leave my case in his hands.”* Many modern versions

and commentators (but contrast **Dhorme**) translate the verbs as hypothetical, i.e., as indicating what Eliphaz would do if he were in Job's situation, **JB**, for example, actually says, "If I were as you are, I should appeal to God." But it is a sign of Eliphaz's attempted delicacy, as also of his self-assuredness, that he speaks only of himself and does not presume to tell Job what to do.

John Hartley: Eliphaz couches his exhortation to Job in a description of what his response would be were he in circumstances similar to Job's. He would appeal to (*dāraš*) God, i.e., he would diligently cry out to God, in a repentant attitude, seeking forgiveness and deliverance. I would commit my cause to God. This means he would not have a defiant attitude like Job's. On the surface it appears that Eliphaz is respectfully sensitive to Job, but Job's response will indicate that he detects a condescending tone in Eliphaz's manner.

B. (:10-11) Only God Can Reverse the Fortunes of the Lowly

1. (:10) Sustenance

*"He gives rain on the earth,
And sends water on the fields,"*

2. (:11) Safety

*"So that He sets on high those who are lowly,
And those who mourn are lifted to safety."*

C. (:12-14) Only God Can Reverse the Fortunes of the Crafty

Robert Alden: A **progression** marks vv. 12-14.

- First, God thwarts the wicked (v. 12).
- Then he apprehends them (v. 13).
- And now he punishes them (v. 14).

1. (:12) Discourages Them

*"He frustrates the plotting of the shrewd,
So that their hands cannot attain success."*

2. (:13) Defeats Them

*"He captures the wise by their own shrewdness
And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted."*

Robert Alden: Note the **chiastic structure**:

A He catches
 B the wise
 C in their craftiness
 C' and the schemes of
 B' the wily
A' are swept away.

3. (:14) Darkens Them

*“By day they meet with darkness,
And grope at noon as in the night.”*

D. (:15-16) Only God Can Provide Hope for the Helpless

*“But He saves from the sword of their mouth,
And the poor from the hand of the mighty.
So the helpless has hope,
And unrighteousness must shut its mouth.”*

John Hartley: These hymnic lines laud God’s **governance** of his world. In complete control of his world, he shames the haughty and prosperous and exalts the poor and needy. It is hard to determine whether this poem is intended to encourage Job or to condemn him. Is Job an example of a clever, rich man whom God has suddenly and swiftly humbled? Or is he a poor, helpless man whom God will exalt in due time? In the next pericope Eliphaz points toward the latter possibility as his answer for Job by emphasizing God’s care for his own, specifically for Job.

VI. (5:17-26) MEANINGFUL DISCIPLINE

Robert Alden: **The Lessons and Rewards of Suffering (5:17-26).** This section takes a different tack from the usual thrust of the friends' case. Rather than focusing on suffering as punishment, Eliphaz posited the possibility that trouble is therapeutic and remedial and that God had Job's good in mind and not only his justice.

Warren Wiersbe: Eliphaz closes his speech with words of **assurance**. The same God who wounds will also heal (**Deut. 32:39; Hos. 6:1-2**). He will deliver you from trouble; save you from your enemies, and give you a long and happy life and a peaceful death. *“We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself”* (**Job 5:27, NIV**).

A. (:17-18) Connection between Divine Discipline and Healing

*“Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves,
So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.
For He inflicts pain, and gives relief;
He wounds, and His hands also heal.”*

John Hartley: Eliphaz hopes to alter Job’s response to his misfortune by instructing him about the security that the one who trusts in God has during a season of affliction.

Robert Alden: Eliphaz had a high view of God. He was not a dualist who saw the bad coming from some evil deity and the good coming from God. Everything came from God's hand, both the wounding and the healing.

B. (:19-22) Divine Discipline Yields Deliverance from Seven Calamities

(:19) Summary

*“From six troubles He will deliver you,
Even in seven evil will not touch you.”*

1. (:20a) Deliverance from Famine

“In famine He will redeem you from death,”

2. (:20b) Deliverance from the Sword

“And in war from the power of the sword.”

3. (:21a) Deliverance from Verbal Attacks

“You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue,”

4. (:21b) Deliverance from Violence

“Neither will you be afraid of violence when it comes.”

Tremper Longman: The first three rescues are from specific and concrete things: war, famine, and speech. **Verse 21b** is more general: God’s people do not need to fear **destruction**. Destruction can come in many forms, so this seems to be a more global reassurance.

5. (:22a) Deliverance from Violence

“You will laugh at violence”

6. (:22b) Deliverance from Famine

“and famine,”

7. Deliverance from Wild Beasts

“Neither will you be afraid of wild beasts.”

C. (:23-26) Divine Blessing Yields Security and Productivity

1. (:23-24) Security

*“For you will be in league with the stones of the field;
And the beasts of the field will be at peace with you.
And you will know that your tent is secure,
For you will visit your abode and fear no loss.”*

David Atkinson: If only Job will admit his sin, he says, there can be happiness again. Job will know security again, his family will prosper again, and he will yet have a vigorous life before he dies (**5:24-27**). We may, in passing, notice the gross **insensitivity** of Eliphaz at this point. It is hardly appropriate to be telling someone who has lost his house and all his descendants in terrible circumstances, that his tent will be secure, and that he will have many children. Nor is it particularly helpful to be saying to someone who wants to die that his remaining years will be full of life. But apart from this, Eliphaz has been speaking part of the truth – though **inappropriately**.

2. (:25-26) Productivity

a. (:25) Productivity of Large Lineage

*“You will know also that your descendants will be many,
And your offspring as the grass of the earth.”*

b. (:26) Productivity of Long and Vigorous Life

*“You will come to the grave in full vigor,
Like the stacking of grain in its season.”*

David Clines: Finally, the **crowning blessing** on a life protected by God is death at a ripe old age. Death before the proper time (cf. **20:11; 22:16**) and being “*cut off*” before life has run its full course (cf. **4:8**) is a curse, and a sign of divine disapproval. Death at “the right time” (“*at its time*”) is no punishment, but itself a blessing (cf. **Ps 1:3; Prov 15:23** for the idea of the right time). It is not long life as such that is the blessing, though that is promised to those who heed the teaching of the wise (**Prov 3:2, 16; 4:10; 9:11; 10:27**); it is rather the patriarchal experience of being “*gathered to one’s fathers*” (cf. **Gen 25:8; 49:33**) that is the final blessing. If the obscure word (“*in ripe old age*,” RSV) means “*in full strength, with vigor unabated*”, a bonus to death at the right time is promised: it is death without the loss of strength and fading of powers that usually accompany extreme old age (cf. Moses, 120 years old when he dies, yet “*his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated*,” **Deut 34:7**; and contrast **Eccl 12:1–7** for the gradual fading of one’s powers).

The image that parallels such a death is strikingly positive: the sheaf of corn that “*comes up*” from the field to the elevated threshing floor has survived through its many moments for this particular moment; “*its time*” for gathering in has arrived. Qohelet would add: “*God has made everything beautiful in its time*” (**Eccl 3:11**). The sheaf has not come to the end of its usefulness; that is only beginning when it mounts to the threshing floor.

John Hartley: Thus the three primary goals of an ancient sheikh—security for his flocks, numerous children to continue his name, and a long life—are ensured by God to the person who accepts his discipline. Through these promises Eliphaz is attempting to get Job to cease lamenting his misfortunes and to exercise submissive trust in God. He does not want Job hastening his death by arousing God’s anger with more caustic words. But in his coming responses Job will challenge Eliphaz’s unilateral application of this teaching of security for the person of faith.

(:27) EPILOGUE – VERIFIED COUNSEL NEEDS TO BE HEARD AND APPLIED

*“Behold this, we have investigated it, thus it is;
Hear it, and know for yourself.”*

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz concludes by putting his personal imprimatur on the argument (v. 27). Wisdom teachers put a lot of stock on observation and experience. They appeal to their previous experience of watching people whom God has reproved moved from danger to safety. Since he and his friends are wise men, Job should take it on their authority. They are taking the position occupied by the father in Proverbs and applying it to their naive son, Job.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are ways in which a Christian counselor can be insensitive and even hurtful?
- 2) How should we respond to a person who claims to have a subjective revelation from God that they want to apply to our specific situation?
- 3) How can we prove to be a true friend to those who are perplexed and suffering?
- 4) How can we restrain ourselves from making black-and-white cause-and-effect applications of biblical principles in cases where our perspective of God's providential workings is limited?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Clines: Eliphaz has in this speech intended to offer Job nothing but assurance and encouragement to patience. To this end he has contrasted Job with the wicked, and has directed Job's attention to the power of God to reverse fortunes. In all that he says, he has drawn upon experience, whether his own (4:12–17) or that of the teachers of wisdom as a group (explicitly in 5:27). But it has been obvious throughout the speech that the "wisdom" Eliphaz offers, though sometimes unexceptionable, has been developed within very narrow categories, and the "experience" of which he speaks is not raw experience of life, but observation filtered through the distorting spectacles of a retributionist theology. He speaks from a theoretical position that cannot really allow the possibility of a Job, and it is only by dint of deviation from the traditional orthodoxy, in questioning the absoluteness of the concept "righteous," that he is able to be as accommodating to Job as he is. All the while, however, there runs beneath Eliphaz's attitude the author's sense of irony at Eliphaz's dogma, and the reader becomes aware that the speech operates on two levels. Occasionally the two levels merge, as when Eliphaz's conventional piety and rhetoric lead him into remarks that are totally inappropriate or even positively painful to Job (cf. on 4:7; 5:4, 19, 25, 26). On the upper level, then, these chapters present a speech of encouragement to Job; on the deeper level, they are an indictment of the cruelty of narrow dogma.

David Thompson: WHEN A GODLY PERSON IS SUFFERING, FRIENDS MUST BE VERY CAREFUL IN WHAT THEY SAY EVEN IF THEY ARE VERY CLOSE, CARING FRIENDS; FOR IF THEIR COUNSEL IS NOT CORRECT, GOD'S ANGER WILL BE TURNED AGAINST THEM.

When we talk to one or about one who has been greatly used by God, we had better weigh our words carefully. Eliphaz would have been far better off to have said, "Job I don't know what is going on here but I do know you are a mighty man of God." But instead of that, he takes off on his verbal tangent as if he really knew the mind of God. He will address Job two more times– (**Job 15; 22**). . .

Now all three friends make the same three and the same wrong assumptions:

- 1) God always sends good to the good and evil to the evil;
- 2) Great suffering is always the result of great sin;
- 3) Repentance will always move God to lift the great suffering.

David Atkinson: In this sense, as we have said, Eliphaz is perfectly right. He reminds Job that he lives in a moral universe, and that godliness will bring its good reward.

Logic is not enough --

However, in another sense, Eliphaz gets it entirely wrong. For he wrongly believes that this theological principle works the other way round: that everything you reap must result from something you have sown. This is manifestly untrue of Job. Eliphaz is here replacing theology with causal logic. He is taking a right theological principle and turning it on its head in a way which is both wrong, and unfair.

We need to be quite clear what is going on. The view that we reap what we sow is really a statement of faith. We believe that God is a good and sovereign Creator who knows what is best for his people. We believe that he judges the world justly. However, from our vantage-point, we do not always know what is best for us, nor can we see how God is ruling his world. In fact what we see often seems to contradict our faith in the goodness of God. . .

This faulty equation of particular sufferings with particular sins results from the faulty process of arguing from one limited theological truth towards an unwarranted logical conclusion. Living faith in the all-sovereign, good and gracious God has become rationalized into a dead orthodoxy based on a theory of natural causes.

We must beware of applying our **causal logic** to the ways of God.

John Hartley: In this first speech Eliphaz earnestly seeks to comfort Job. He desires that Job may find a way out of his suffering and be restored to a richer relationship with God. Acknowledging that Job has lived in the fear of God, he is somewhat shaken by the harsh tones of Job's opening curse-lament. Thus he suspects that Job may have inadvertently committed some wrong that has aroused God's anger. Nevertheless, at this time he will not accuse Job of any blatant sin. Rather he grounds the reason for

Job's suffering in the limitations and sinfulness of all creatures. No one is without error before God. Consequently, Job's plight is no serious disgrace, but primarily an occasion for him to beseech God's mercy and experience his saving grace. Confession, then, would not be such an act of humiliation that Job would lose status in the community, but an act of obedient response to God as his Lord.

Fearful that Job's attitude will lead him into further conflict with God, Eliphaz emphasizes the doctrine of retribution and exhorts Job to beseech God's mercy so that he may experience God's saving grace. To encourage such a response he lauds God's greatness and in a numerical saying describes the great benefits which attend those whom God delivers from sorrow. By yielding to God Job will find the peace and quiet he desires so earnestly (**3:13, 26**). God will abundantly bless every aspect of his life; his flocks will richly increase, he will have abundant offspring, and he will die at a ripe old age and be buried in honor. Underlying this instruction is the conviction that God is willing and able to reverse one's plight.

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz's basic point is that God uses suffering to restore sinners to a proper relationship with him: "*See, blessed are those whom God reproveth, so do not reject the instruction of Shaddai*" (**Job 5:17**). This is reminiscent of **Prov. 3:11–12**:

The discipline of Yahweh, my son, do not reject, and do not loathe his correction. For the one whom Yahweh loves he will correct, even like a father who treats a son favorably.

The Proverbs passage is quoted in **Heb. 12:5–6**, where the author also makes the argument that suffering is often for the good of a person who otherwise would wander away from God and toward death. Thus suffering is for good.

While Eliphaz's argument that suffering is disciplinary is often true, it is not true all the time. 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. From the preface, we know this is not the case.

E.S.P. Heavenor: His ready assumption that Job's suffering must be the reaping of his own sinfulness ill-equipped him to be a true comforter. He was not wrong to claim that he had a divine explanation of the facts of human suffering. Experience abundantly testifies that in countless ways man brings trouble upon himself by his sinfulness. Eliphaz was a mouthpiece of divine revelation there; but when he went on to assume that he had a divine commentary upon all the facts of human suffering and that he had correctly diagnosed Job's case, it was the word of man, not the Word of God. He has not stood where we have stood, witnessing the clash between God and the accuser in the heavenly places, where issues of which Job and Eliphaz are ignorant are being decided. He has not learnt the salutary humility of Paul's confession of the limitations of human knowledge: "now we see in a mirror dimly". How often a man must find a place for that confession in his religious thinking, and not least of all with regard to the problem of suffering!

Francis Andersen: Eliphaz's fault is not that his doctrine is unsound; it is his **ineptness as a counsellor**. True words may be thin medicine for a man in the depths. It is not that Job is at present rationally inaccessible, to be treated as a neurotic. His depression is legitimate and wholesome. The reality that God has given him is poverty and sickness. It is not a return to truth to deflect his mind to a promise of health, while he is scratching himself on his ash-heap; to promise him wealth, while the brigands make off with his animals; to give him dreams of numerous descendants, while his children lie crushed by the fallen stones. Eliphaz has done his best, with the best of the old theology. But the author of Job is about to take giant new strides into a vaster, but more mysterious, understanding of God. By binding God to certain rules, Eliphaz safeguards his morality. But to bring God under obligation to a morality beyond his will is a threat to his sovereignty, especially when it is a man who thinks he knows what that morality should be.

Job believes that God, as Sovereign, may give or retrieve his gifts at his pleasure (**1:21b**); he may send good or bad (**2:10b**). He is not accountable to any man for such actions. Eliphaz thinks he knows how to get along with a predictable (and that means, to some extent, manageable) God. Job, who has no such pretensions, faces the agony of getting along with a God over whom he has absolutely no control or even influence. Eliphaz's speech, with which Job has no quarrel as a general statement of the power and justice of God, is beside the mark, because it simply does not fit Job's case. Job had long since learnt to view his good life as a gift, not a reward, so he has no complaint when it is removed. He has submitted no petition for its restoration. Even in the end that will not come as an answer to prayer. Hence he does not want from Eliphaz the soothing word that if he would only do this or that, everything could be restored to 'normal'. As if **Job 1:1–5** defined the norm! The affirmations which Job has so magnificently made in **1:21** and **2:10** lead him into a new task. He must normalize, find the rightness of, his relationship with God as it is 'now' (**6:3**). His lament in **chapter 3** marks his entry upon that assignment. To find consolation in the thought that his afflictions will be brief, that soon all will be as it used to be (**5:17–26**), would deflect him from this necessary and immediate task. Unless we see this, we shall not appreciate the vehemence of the outburst that instantly follows in Job's next speech. . .

The reader knows what Job does not know, namely that Job's highest wisdom is to love God for himself alone. . .

Job is being tested. It is essential that he does not know why. He must ask why. He must test and reject all the answers attempted by men. In the end he will find satisfaction in what God himself tells him.

Charles Swindoll: Somewhere in that bad sermon, accusation overran compassion. And don't think Job missed it. A person in pain doesn't feel well, but that doesn't mean there's a lack of discernment. People who are hurting don't do well when we deliver a mixture of Ghengis Kahn and Mike Tyson rolled into one verbal blast. Furthermore, if you don't have God's clear mind and indisputable facts to prove it, please, just love

your hurting friend and keep quiet. If there is insight to be gained, it will be gained through comfort and tender mercy, not rebuke and accusation. On occasion, yes, as we saw earlier in the Proverbs, there are those moments when reproofs are necessary. But while covered with boils? No.

TEXT: Job 6:1 – 7:21

TITLE: JOB ATTACKS HIS COUNSELORS AND HIS GOD

BIG IDEA:

JOB ATTACKS HIS COUNSELORS AND HIS GOD VIA LAMENTING AND COMPLAINING ABOUT HIS UNDESERVED SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: In form the speech as a whole belongs to the **appeal** (often called the **lament**). In **chap. 7**, which is directed solely toward God, it conforms in many points to the psalmic models of the appeal; and **chap. 7** also, where the friends are addressed in vv 14–30, is formally speaking an appeal to them to disclose what they believe to be the sin for which he is suffering (6:24). . . it is an appeal, with a prominence of elements from the **disputation**. . .

It is important to notice that, as distinct from the psalmic models, Job's appeal is not for deliverance from his distress by restoration to life, but for **death** as the only means of escape from his suffering. And he does not appeal to God to pay attention to him, but to "*look away*" from him (7:19). . .

In function, the speech has a double focus. On the one hand, in its address to the friends, it offers them the opportunity of convincing Job that he does in fact deserve what is happening to him, and on the other, in its address to God, it calls upon God to desist from attacking him so that he may live out his few remaining days in comparative peace.

The nodal verses in this speech may then be identified in two places; for **chap. 6**, it is Job's demand to the friends to "*show [him] where [he] has erred*" (6:24) that is crucial; for **chap. 7**, it is the cry to God to "*Leave me alone*" (7:16b) that is quintessential.

Elmer Smick: Job attacks the counselors (**ch. 6**) and God (**ch. 7**), giving as his excuse for his rage the depth of his misery (6:2–3; 7:11). His words, disturbing as they are, arise from a limited knowledge (38:2) and his determination to speak only the truth as he sees it. "*How painful are honest words!*" (6:25). He views God as the author of his misery and opens (6:4) and closes (7:20) the speech with a figure of God shooting arrows in him. He finds life an unbearable arena of torment.

Once again Job's suffering is so intense that death will come as an exquisite release (6:8–10). Few have suffered as intensely as Job, so it is difficult for us to identify with his rage. But for those who have a similar experience, the words of Job can bring immense comfort for the simple reason that many sufferers have felt rage but have been too ashamed to express it. That a man who had experienced such faith should speak from the depth of his being such words of anguish can only strengthen those in anguish.

The psalms of lament (e.g., **Pss 77; 88**) also suggest that God allows for and even encourages honest expression of one's pain to him.

Job argues persuasively his case against the counselors. They have been no help. Their words are bad medicine or, as Job puts it, bad food (**6:6–7**). They are undependable (**6:14–23**) and cruel (**6:27–30**), and they view him as too great a risk to offer any help (**6:21**). Job challenges them to prove he is wrong (**6:24**) and pleads with them for the milk of human kindness (**6:14, 28**).

Warren Wiersbe: Job responded with two passionate appeals. First, he appealed to his three friends that they might show more understanding and sympathy (**Job 6**). Then he appealed to God, that He would consider his plight and lighten his sufferings before he died (**Job 7**).

Robert Alden: In this two-chapter response Job introduces some of the themes that characterize his speeches throughout the book: depression, disappointment, and desire for death.

John Hartley: The self-lament form dominates this speech, as attested by several elements: a vivid description of one's suffering (**6:2–4; 7:3–6**), the expression of distress at the behavior of one's friends (**6:14–30**), anticipation of death (**6:11–13; 7:8–10**), and accusations against God (**6:4; 7:11–16**). The friends take the place that the enemy usually occupies in a psalm of lament, for more agonizing than the taunting of enemies is the dismay caused by the betrayal of friends, a motif found in some psalms of lament (e.g., **Ps. 35:13–15; 41:10 [Eng. 9]; 55:13–15 [Eng. 12–14]**). Already the distance between the friends and Job is visible. Instead of upholding him they increase his burden by accusing and shaming him. Then in the latter part of this speech Job makes use of legal terms to strengthen his lament. In **7:12** he speaks as a plaintiff arguing his case before the court, and in **7:17–21** he interrogates God, his accuser. Job's use of legal terms is rooted in his conviction that he is innocent.

(:1) PROLOGUE – FIRST REPLY OF JOB

“Then Job answered,”

I. (6:2-30) JOB ATTACKS HIS COUNSELORS

A. (:1-13) Lamenting His Hopeless Condition

1. (:1-7) Anguish over His Terrible Suffering

Brian Borgman: Job's hope is that God would take his life (**6:1-13**)

- A. The unbearable weight of my grief (**6:2-4**)
- B. I have a right to complain (**6:5-7**)
- C. I want God to end my life so I can have some comfort (**6:8-10**)
- D. I have no more strength to live (**6:11-13**)

Warren Wiersbe: What didn't Job's friends fully understand?

- The heaviness of his suffering (6:1-3)
- The bitterness of his suffering (6:4-7)
- The hopelessness of his situation (6:8-13)

Elmer Smick: vv. 1-7 -- The two themes of Job's speech are introduced here. In vv.1-4 Job complains against God and in verses 5-7 against the counselors. First, he attempts to justify his own "impetuous" words (v.3) with an appeal to his overwhelming misery brought on by the arrows of God (v.4). Then he claims the right to bray like a donkey or bellow like an ox deprived of fodder and left to starve (v.5). Job starves for the right words that, like food (Am 8:11), can bring strength and nourishment. The food Eliphaz dishes out is absolutely tasteless; worse, it turns Job's stomach (vv.6-7). Despite his bodily misery Job's major concern is for the needs of his spirit. If only he could hear words that would nourish his soul rather than sicken him more!

a. (:2-3) Heavy Burden

*"Oh that my vexation were actually weighed,
And laid in the balances together with my iniquity!
3 For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas,
Therefore my words have been rash."*

David Clines: Job's sufferings have not only been the losses depicted in chaps. 1-2; they have also been what he has experienced psychically. Together they form an unimaginable burden. If only that burden could be physically demonstrated on some cosmic scales, an Eliphaz would be convinced that Job's outburst is not in the least excessive. . .

Job is not apologizing for anything, far less confessing to any indiscretion (contrast RSV "my words have been rash"), not even to the form of his language rather than its substance (as **Duhm, Peake**). He simply wishes that it could be demonstrated how words of such misery have been forced out of him. He cries out for an understanding of his incapacity for restraint to a man who has done nothing but urge restraint (in the form of patience) upon him.

b. (:4) Divine Target

*"For the arrows of the Almighty are within me;
Their poison my spirit drinks;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me."*

David Clines: For the first time, Job explicitly names God as the ultimate (and immediate) cause of his suffering. Of course, he knows nothing of the events that have taken place in heaven that make his complaint only all the better founded. He simply knows that what happens to him does not arise from any guilt of his own, and since he presumably agrees with Eliphaz that trouble is not self-generating (5:6-7), there is only one direction in which he can look for the origin of his suffering.

Tremper Longman: Indeed, Job insists that God's terrors are "*ranged*" against him. In this context, "*ranged*" ('rk) may have a military connotation, since the root can mean to "*enter into battle*." God is at war against Job.

c. (:5-7) Repulsive Situation

*"Does the wild donkey bray over his grass,
Or does the ox low over his fodder?
6 Can something tasteless be eaten without salt,
Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?
7 My soul refuses to touch them;
They are like loathsome food to me."*

David Clines: Vs. 5 -- In this rhetorical question, the affirmation implied is that if one receives what is appropriate one does not complain about it. . . Job receives the very contrary of what is due to him as a righteous man; what wonder then if he cries out?

Vs. 6 -- In the next question, the underlying affirmation is that there are substances too unappetizing to be eaten. One might be offered them as food but reject them with revulsion. This again is Job's situation: he is refusing to swallow the pill that God has prescribed. His protests arise wholly from the revolting nature of what he has been offered in place of the wholesome nutriment of life.

Robert Alden: v. 6 -- The point of the verse is that Job felt he had been served a tasteless and even repulsive diet by God.

John Hartley: vs. 7 -- Just as Job's appetite would refuse putrid food, so his inner being recoils before his suffering. No wonder such bitter words pour from his mouth. Lamenting is the natural expression of a person being repulsed by tragic misfortune.

2. (:8-10) Appeal to God for Release from Suffering via Death

a. (:8-9) Hoping for Death

*"Oh that my request might come to pass,
And that God would grant my longing!
9 Would that God were willing to crush me;
That He would loose His hand and cut me off!"*

John Hartley: If he knew his death were near and certain, the present suffering would be a little easier to bear, for the fact that God had answered this prayer would itself be some consolation. He would leap up, even though filled with unsparing pain (*hîlâ*, a word used particularly for labor pains).

John MacArthur: This is a metaphor from a weaver, who **cuts off** the excess thread on the loom (cf. **Is 38:12**).

b. (:10) Hanging on to His Integrity

"But it is still my consolation,

*And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.”*

David Clines: this is not merely a protestation of innocence by Job, but a desperate appeal for a speedy end to his life because he fears he cannot maintain his right behavior much longer (cf. vv 11–13).

3. (:11-13) Abandonment to Powerlessness and Hopelessness

a. (:11-12) Powerlessness

*“What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should endure?
Is my strength the strength of stones,
Or is my flesh bronze?”*

David Clines: The feeling of weakness under the weight of suffering returns. This is a **psychic lassitude**, no doubt felt physically as well; it is essentially a conviction of a complete lack of inner resources (cf. v 13). It is not that he suffers so badly from his physical diseases and is so enfeebled by them that he no longer sees anything to live for and can only hope for death as a relief from his sufferings. On the contrary, his self-worth has been so radically undermined by the absence of desert in his suffering that his psyche or spirit has been totally drained of strength; he is as good as dead physically. Death would be just an outward and visible sign of his inward feeling. . .

It is not the insensitivity of stone and bronze that is the point, but Job’s feeling of weakness compared with these commonplace natural symbols of strength.

Elmer Smick: Job complains that he has no reason to be **patient**, for he has nothing to look forward to (v.11). As a vulnerable creature made of flesh, he has no human resources left (v.12). Even his natural ability, the gifts that have contributed to his success, has been driven from him (v.13). This is a reply to Eliphaz’s words in 4:2–6.

b. (:13) Hopelessness

*“Is it that my help is not within me,
And that deliverance is driven from me?”*

Tremper Longman: vv. 11-13 -- In these verses, Job expresses his feeling of **utter powerlessness**. Again he uses **rhetorical questions**, five of them, followed by a climactic statement. In this case, the first four anticipated answers are negative; the final one is affirmative, but it contributes to the depressing mood of the unit. First, he has no strength that would allow him to endure any longer in hope of restoration and healing. Second, and flowing from the first, he has no end or resolution imaginable that would get him to make plans for (arrange) his life. Third, his strength is not the strength of stones. It is much softer than that. Fourth, his flesh is not bronze, able to resist the blows of Shaddai and others. The last question has an affirmative answer: indeed, there is no help for him, or so he thinks.

B. (6:14-30) Complaining about the Lack of Loyalty from His Friends

1. (:14-23) Rebuke for Their Treachery

a. (:14) Desire for Kindness

*“For the despairing man there should be kindness
from his friend;
Lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty.”*

John Hartley: Job argues that in failing to show him loyalty they forsake the fear of Shaddai (cf. **1:1**). In this phrase Job specifically uses the divine name *Shaddai* in response to Eliphaz’s use of Shaddai in the beatitude (**5:17**). The phrase “*the fear of God*” means both reverence toward God and living by a high ethical standard. Therefore, the friends are destroying the basis of their worship of God and the foundation of their wisdom. Whereas Eliphaz is shocked that Job’s fear of God does not sustain him during his misfortunes (**4:6**), Job is distressed that the friends’ fear of Shaddai does not move them to support him through his troubles. Both parties are thus attacking the center of the other’s worship of God.

b. (:15-20) Disappointed by Deceitfulness

*“My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi, Like the torrents
of wadis which vanish, 16 Which are turbid because of ice, And
into which the snow melts. 17 When they become waterless, they
are silent, When it is hot, they vanish from their place. 18 The
paths of their course wind along, They go up into nothing and
perish. 19 The caravans of Tema looked, The travelers of Sheba
hoped for them. 20 They were disappointed for they had trusted,
They came there and were confounded.”*

Meredith Kline: As the plural forms indicate, this chapter is addressed to all the friends. For they all concurred in the views of Eliphaz, and by glance and gesture had no doubt signified the “Amen” which would presently become vocal in their own speeches.

David Clines: What Job means by “**loyalty**” is plainly different from what the friends mean by it. He is looking for unqualified acceptance that takes his side whether he is in the right or the wrong. They offer sympathy and support, but only from what seems to them a realistic point of view; it is absurd, they would argue, to take the stance “my friend right or wrong” when the evidence (Job’s suffering) proves that—to some extent at least—Job is in the wrong. Are they to disregard the evidence of their eyes and their learning, and prop Job up in what they believe to be a falsely self-righteous position? Eliphaz has done his utmost to emphasize Job’s essential goodness, but he had to point out as delicately as he knew how that even the righteous are not perfect. Could any more be expected of a “loyal” friend?

In the first of two closely related triplets, Job compares his friends’ unreliability with that of the desert wadis whose water cannot be relied on from one season to the next. The natural image for such unreliability is the seasonal wadi of Palestine, full to overflowing in the rainy season, and a dry watercourse in the heat of summer (cf. **Jer**

15:18; Isa 58:11; cf. 33:16). The wadis overflow when their water is not needed; when it is needed they have nothing to offer. So it is with Job's friends and their loyalty.

Francis Andersen: His friends (he calls them my brothers) have proved false like a wadi stream. In the Holy Land a sudden rain can fill a dry gulch with rushing flood-waters, but they vanish just as quickly into the porous rock. Jeremiah uses the same bold image for the fickleness of God (**Jer. 15:18**).

c. (:21) Deterrence of Dread

*“Indeed, you have now become such,
You see a terror and are afraid.”*

David Clines: The double image of the dried-up wadi applies to Job's experience with his friends: not only has he found them unreliable and inconsistent (cf. vv 15–17), he has felt himself deceived by them (cf. vv 18–20). He suffers, like the traveler in the desert, not only a disappointment of expectation, but a danger to life.

Francis Andersen: There is a profound pastoral insight here; it is often fear that prevents a would-be counsellor from attaining much empathy with his client. On the face of it, Job is unreasonably severe. Eliphaz has just started, and is doing his best. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. There is no act of pastoral care more unnerving than trying to say the right thing to someone hysterical with grief. It is early in the day for Job to lose patience with them. But the point is not whether Job is unfair: this is how he feels. The truth is already in sight that only God can speak the right word. And Job's wits are sharp enough to forecast where Eliphaz's trend of thought will end—in open accusation of sin. Hence he gets in first with a pre-emptive strike, anticipating in the following denials his great speech of exculpation in **chapter 31**.

John Hartley: Fear has dissolved their loyalty and preempted their efforts to console him.

d. (:22-23) Denial of Unrealistic Expectations

*“Have I said, 'Give me something,'
Or, 'Offer a bribe for me from your wealth,'
23 Or, 'Deliver me from the hand of the adversary,'
Or, 'Redeem me from the hand of the tyrants'?”*

David Clines: Job disclaims any **excessive demands** upon his friends; the little he asked from them is the “loyalty” (v 14) of friendship. If only Job knew that what he in fact desires from them, namely to take his part in a struggle against God for vindication, is a far more demanding test of loyalty than any of these four sarcastically worded requests he says he might have made! It seems that the first two claims that Job denies, in his battery of rhetorical questions, have to do with **money**. . . The second pair of claims Job says he has never made (v 23) is to have asked his friends to **expose themselves to danger** in order to rescue him from some adversary (whether at law or in battle) or from some tyrant or brigand.

Robert Alden: Job already had found their counsel unproductive and mean-spirited.

2. (:24-30) Reconsider Your Harsh Position

a. (:24) Counsel Me with the Facts and I Will Listen

*“Teach me, and I will be silent;
And show me how I have erred.”*

Warren Wiersbe: Job made two requests of his friends: “*Teach me*” (v. 24) and “*Look upon me*” (v 28). He didn’t need accusation; he needed illumination! But they wouldn’t even look him in the face and behold his plight. Physically, the three men were sitting with Job on the ash heap; but emotionally, they were like the priest and Levite, passing by “*on the other side*” (**Luke 10:30-37**).

b. (:25-27) Callousness is Hurtful

*“How painful are honest words!
But what does your argument prove?
26 Do you intend to reprove my words,
When the words of one in despair belong to the wind?
27 You would even cast lots for the orphans,
And barter over your friend.”*

Roy Zuck: The three friends seemed as opposed to him as if they were taking undue advantage of an orphan or even selling a friend!

Charles Swindoll: To be a good counselor requires enormous timing, great wisdom, a long rope, and great understanding. Job is pleading for all of that as he asks Eliphaz to consider his miserable plight.

c. (:28-30) Consider My Integrity and Discernment

*“And now please look at me,
And see if I lie to your face.
Desist now, let there be no injustice;
Even desist, my righteousness is yet in it.
Is there injustice on my tongue?
Cannot my palate discern calamities?”*

Robert Alden: One's reputation for righteousness was crucial to one's standing in the community. To attack it was tantamount to bearing false witness against a neighbor.

John Hartley: Job’s point is that since he can detect no wrong desire or deception on his part, he believes that the friends need to place some confidence in what he is saying.

David Clines: All criticism of the friends’ ineffectualness is here put aside for the time being while Job pleads with them to “look” at him, “return” or “turn” to him so that the most significant communication can occur. His death-wish is also stifled temporarily,

so that his protestation of innocence may dominate the discussion. Job's mood is not hopeful; he does not expect anything much of his friends beyond listening to him; but he must make this protestation of innocence.

II. (7:1-21a) JOB ATTACKS HIS GOD

John Hartley: In the second part of this speech Job leaves off addressing the comforters and **speaks directly to God**. After lamenting his fate, Job details his own physical agony and bemoans the hard lot of humanity in general. He complains bitterly to God for treating him so harshly, and he reminds God that he will soon die. Then he seeks to motivate God to ease his sufferings for the few days he has left before dying. He reasons that anything that he might have done could not have harmed God and that after his death God will seek him eagerly, but not be able to find him. That Job speaks realistically about his pains here, in contrast to the unrealistic wish never to have been born that he uttered in his curse-lament (**ch. 3**), means that he is beginning to cope with his real situation. He is reaching beyond his despair to find reconciliation with God.

John MacArthur: vv. 1-10 –

- He felt like a slave under tyranny of his master, longing for relief and reward (vv. 1, 2);
- he was sleepless (vv. 3, 4);
- he was loathsome because of worms and scabs, dried filth, and new running sores (v. 5);
- he was like a weaver's shuttle, tossed back and forth (v. 6);
- he was like a breath or cloud that comes and goes on its way to death (vv. 7-10).

In this discourse, Job attempted to reconcile in his own mind what God was doing.

A. (:1-10) Lamenting the Futility of Life

1. (:1-3) Futility of Hard Service in Life

*“Is not man forced to labor on earth,
And are not his days like the days of a hired man?
2 As a slave who pants for the shade,
And as a hired man who eagerly waits for his wages,
3 So am I allotted months of vanity,
And nights of trouble are appointed me.”*

Francis Andersen: A man's life-time (lit. days; cf. 1:5) is a period of harsh employment. In either context the burdensome thing is that the toil is not of one's own choosing nor for one's own benefit. **Chapter 1** shows that Job did not mind hard work. It is the indignity of his present plight that he resents.

John Hartley: Job mourns that his sorrow is greater than that of these common laborers. Instead of receiving a reward, even a meager one, he has been made to *inherit* [Hophal of *nāḥal*] months of emptiness [*šāw*]. The language of inheritance may allude to his fear that he is made to suffer for the sins of his forefathers. and nights of misery [*āmāl*]

are allotted to me. His personal feeling is underscored by the prepositional phrase to me (*lî*). He can find no relief or joy at all in his allotted position, in contrast to the slave who enjoys the shade or the worker who receives a wage. His lot has brought him lower than the lowest class of men. Allotted or “*measured out*” (*minnâ*) indicates his conviction that God has arbitrarily determined his fate.

2. (:4) Futility of Sleeplessness

*“When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’
But the night continues,
And I am continually tossing until dawn.”*

3. (:5) Futility of Physical Affliction

*“My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt;
My skin hardens and runs.”*

Elmer Smick: vv. 3-10 -- These are the words of a chronic sufferer. There have been months of futility and nights of tossing in misery, nights that seem to drag on endlessly (vv.3-4). Yet almost in the same breath Job describes his purposeless life as passing with incredible speed (v.6)—a complaint heard on the lips of the aging or any who feel their days are numbered (vv.7-10). In v.5 Job describes one of the symptoms of his disease—scabs that crack and fester. What kind of disease is this? We cannot be sure. But worse than the disease itself, Job has lost all hope of being healed. He believes his only release from pain is death.

4. (:6) Futility of Purposelessness

*“My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
And come to an end without hope.”*

John Hartley: Thus Job’s request is simple and basic; he longs to experience again the joys of normal life before death robs him of life.

5. (:7-10) Futility of Brevity of Life

a. (:7-8) Extinguished – No More Experience of God’s Goodness

*“Remember that my life is but breath,
My eye will not again see good.
8 The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more;
Thine eyes will be on me, but I will not be.”*

David Clines: This cry to God to “remember” the brevity of his life is no indirect appeal to God to restore him to health (contrast Fohrer), but an appeal to God to ignore him; that is the only relief to his pain that Job can envisage.

b. (:9-10) Forgotten – No More Human Relationship

*“When a cloud vanishes, it is gone,
So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.”*

*10 He will not return again to his house,
Nor will his place know him anymore.”*

David Clines: Job has two grounds for this astonishing request that God should leave him alone. The first is the misery of his pain-ridden life (vv 1–5), the second the imminence and inevitability of his death (vv 6–10).

B. (:11-21a) Complaining against God’s Unending Harassment

David Clines: This final segment of the speech contains two strophes. The first (vv 11–16), after an introductory announcement (v 11), complains of God’s harassment of him, especially by nightmares (v 14), and comes to rest on the sentence “*Let me alone*” (v 16b). The second (vv 17–21), again after an introductory element consisting of a quotation (v 17), pleads for God to desist from his harassment (v 19), and then takes a bold step in challenging the rationale for God’s behavior toward him (vv 20–21a), before coming to rest finally on the sentence “*Now I am about to lie in the dust of death*” (v 21b). . .

In this strophe (vv 11–16), as in the next (vv 17–21), the focus is upon God’s attack upon him; but the strophe ends on the more plaintive note of his assurance that he “*will not live long* (lit., *forever*)” and that his “*days are a mere breath*.” If God will not altogether forbear to close-guard him like a monster (v 12), or to disturb his sleep with terrifying visions (v 14), can he not grant Job some short intermission from these assaults? By the time God is ready to resume them, Job will certainly be dead.

1. (:11-16) Point of Job’s Complaint – Why Can’t You Just Let Me Die?

a. (:11) Honest Communication

*“Therefore, I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”*

b. (:12) Harmless Threat

*“Am I the sea, or the sea monster,
That Thou dost set a guard over me?”*

Brian Borgman:

- I am no threat to You! (12)
- If I look for the smallest comfort, You take it away (13-14)

c. (:13-15) Horrific Dreams

*“If I say, ‘My bed will comfort me,
My couch will ease my complaint,’
14 Then Thou dost frighten me with dreams
And terrify me by visions;
15 So that my soul would choose suffocation,
Death rather than my pains.”*

Robert Alden: The four Hebrew words of v. 14 form a simple, clear chiasmus:

A Then you scare me
B with dreams
B' and with visions
A' You terrify me.

d. (:16) Human Mortality

*“I waste away; I will not live forever.
Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.”*

John Hartley: Truly the **vanity** of life itself should be punishment enough without having undeserved and painful woes added to his lot. If God leaves him alone, his pain might be alleviated and he might enjoy the good for his few remaining days.

Job’s affliction defies his every attempt to assign any **meaning** to his experience. This seemingly meaningless encounter with suffering challenges to the core his view of God, for he knows that God, the source of meaning, is ultimately responsible for his dilemma and must respond to him. Meanwhile, his search for an answer to his fate stretches to the limit his belief in a benevolent God. Because of his faith he earnestly seeks for the answer from God.

2. (:17-21a) Plea for a Reprieve – Why Do You Bother Hassling People?

Derek Kidner: vv. 17-21 – The final verses of **chapter 7** sound a bit like **Psalm 8**, but it is in the form of a “bitter parody”. Instead of expressing wonder that the Almighty takes such care of so seemingly insignificant a creature as man, Job is angry that man has become the object of his scrutiny and, yes, it has now to be said, cruelty, even sadism. Job seems to be aware of an evil eye upon him and he cries out to God to leave him alone (**7:14-16**). His words become wild. In effect, he says, “If I have sinned, what harm have I done? You are too big to be hurt by a puny little thing like me; and in any case since I am a burden to you and to myself, why not be done with me?” What Job, of course, does not know is that there are more powerful creatures to be restrained than mythological sea creatures. Satan has challenged god’s order. He needs to be put down. In Job’s suffering, God’s honour is at stake.

a. (:17-19) Turn Your Attention Away from Me

*“What is man that Thou dost magnify him,
And that Thou art concerned about him,
18 That Thou dost examine him every morning,
And try him every moment?
19 Wilt Thou never turn Thy gaze away from me,
Nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle?”*

Robert Alden: Ordinarily it is a good thing to have God's eye on you. But Job wished that God would stop watching him because it meant to him only condemnation and

grief (although this was far from true; cf. 1:8).

John Hartley: But the psalmist's ardor only deepens Job's despair. Job experiences God's vigilance as unrelenting oppression. So he turns these hymnic lines inside out. Instead of praising God with them Job uses them as a complaint against God's continual effort to find and punish his every flaw. God's testing becomes a burden too heavy for him, a mere moral, to bear.

b. (:20) Tell Me What I Have Done Wrong

*"Have I sinned?
What have I done to Thee, O watcher of men?
Why hast Thou set me as Thy target,
So that I am a burden to myself?"*

David Clines: The irony of disproportion (cf. on v 12) strikes Job again. Can the alleged sin of one dying man be so harmful to God that he must bend all his energies to the harassment of that man? Out of all the objects that deserve God's wrath, is it not absurd that Job has been set up as the target (cf. 6:4; and see further on 16:12)? Is it not ironic that the man who is so light and insubstantial that his days are a breath (vv 7, 16) seems to have become a "*burden*" to God? Is not God's preoccupation with Job, in short, totally **disproportionate** to Job's significance?

c. (:21a) Take Away Any Hypothetical Sins

*"Why then dost Thou not pardon my transgression
And take away my iniquity?"*

David Clines: God must have something against Job to make him suffer as he does. Very well, says Job; I will not debate whether God is right in counting me a sinner; I will only ask that he should overlook and "*forgive*" (i.e., not punish) the sin of a feeble dying man like myself. The verse lies entirely in the shadow of the **hypothesis** of v 20, "*If I have sinned*"; that is, "my sin" means "my (hypothetical) sin," the sin that must be hypothesized if my suffering is to be explained.

Elmer Smick: It is a mistake to think, however, that Job is wrestling with a purely intellectual problem. No, his concern is more **experiential** than **cognitive**, though he is also seeking a way to make his experience (suffering) agree with his theology (the justice of God). Hebrew sages in the OT were not trying to solve logical syllogisms. Job's pathetic words at the end of this chapter show that he still entertains doubts about his own blameworthiness, but they also suggest that he **feels as if God is being unjust**. These are words he will eventually regret (40:4).

(:21b) EPILOGUE – RESIGNED TO DEATH

*"For now I will lie down in the dust;
And Thou wilt seek me, but I will not be."*

Derek Kidner: Towards the end of this speech he says something quite extraordinary. Like a child who is angry with its parents and storms out, Job seems to say, “You’ll be sorry when I’m gone!” (7:21). He is bruised, his relationship with God under severe strain, and he throws out one final retort to the Almighty. Knowing that God essentially cares, Job says, “You’ll be sorry when I’m gone.” Despite all that is happening to him, Job still thinks of God as one who loves him, else he would not be angry. Despite the pain, the indignity, the unanswered questions, there is a relationship between the two that Job is still conscious of – even in the darkness of his soul’s present condition.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we ever justified to express anger towards the Lord?
- 2) How can we express compassion and sensitivity in our counseling of others?
- 3) What lessons do you take away from the brevity of life?
- 4) How do you escape the futility of the human condition?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Clines: So when Job comes to address the friends (6:14–30) his attitude is unsurprising: they have cheated him of the one thing he might have expected from them: an understanding sympathy. The bitterness of his irony arises from their denial of the essence of friendship: loyalty (*hesed*, 6:14). All that anyone could offer Job is support and acceptance; but they have found the sight of suffering too frightening, and despite their physical nearness and their verbal communication they have backed away from Job psychically. For Job, friendship has issued in isolation.

The third movement of Job’s speech (7:1–21) is, by contrast to the address to the friends, quite unexpected. Direct address to God in the midst of formal debate with his interlocutors may be out of place and inappropriate, but, all considered, it is only in that direction that speech has any value for Job. The monologue of **chap. 3** was impotent, dialogue with the friends has already proved distressingly disappointing; where else can Job turn his words than toward God? His instinct to do so, his single-minded assurance that it is God with whom he has to do, will prove his salvation in the end. For the present, though, he asks nothing of God but that he should let him alone (7:16) so that his few remaining days may be free from pain. Yet in the very act of begging God to desert him he approaches him; the ambivalence in Job’s attitude to the presence and absence of God that will be laid bare in the developing drama has already been signaled.

Francis Andersen: Job's thoughts are as violent as the sieve of testing in which God has permitted the Satan to shake him. He appeals to God to make his agony endurable by making it meaningful. Otherwise let him show pity by bringing Job to death. Job's pain has the authenticity of all who have been injured in their wrestling with God, even though they limp for the rest of their life (**Gen. 32:31**). If he seems defiant, it is the daring of faith. All Job has known about God he still believes. But God's inexplicable ways have his mind perplexed to breaking-point. Job is in the right; but he does not know that God is watching with silent compassion and admiration until the test is fully done and it is time to state his approval publicly (**Job 42:8**).

John Hartley: In this speech Job laments the treachery of his friends and the agony of his fate. But in comparison with his opening curse-lament, his mood is less caustic. Instead of thinking only about the advantages of dying, he begins to ponder the possibility of relief from his illness in this life. Forcefully, though, he defends his right to lament. While he vividly bemoans his pain, both physical and emotional, the majority of this speech is an attack on his antagonists, both the comforters and God. He denounces his friends for their lack of faithful loyalty in their thinking that he deserves his affliction. And he accuses God, directly and pointedly, of being excessively cruel to him. Although Job has a long way to go before he gains the confidence to challenge God for a resolution of his case, he has taken the first step. By centering his complaint on these specific issues and looking at their impact on his emotional life, Job begins to give focus to his suffering. As he begins to channel some of his hurt into anger toward the friends and God, he is moving away from self-pity. This enables him to muster his few resources to overcome his difficulties by attempting to prove the rightness of his case. Although despairing and wanting to die, he never succumbs to his illness. His desire to be vindicated spurs his will to live. Since he refuses to give up on life, he will never abandon his search for God.

David Thompson: In this portion of Scripture, Job defends his right to speak and his right to be depressed and even his right to want to die because Eliphaz had shot off his big mouth.

A RIGHTEOUS MAN, WHO IS SUFFERING, DOES HAVE A RIGHT TO RESPOND TO FALSE CRITICISMS AND HONESTLY EXPRESS HIMSELF TO GOD.

God never holds Job accountable for what he says about and to his friends. God does hold Job's friends accountable for what they said to and about him. There are five verbal responses Job gives to the verbal diatribe of Eliphaz:

VERBAL RESPONSE #1 – Job's gives a defense of his depression. **6:1-7**

VERBAL RESPONSE #2 – Job's gives a defense of his desire to die. **6:8-13**

VERBAL RESPONSE #3 – Job shares his disappointment with his friends. **6:14-30**

VERBAL RESPONSE #4 – Job’s description of his life. **7:1-10**

VERBAL RESPONSE #5 – Job’s discourse to God. **7:11-21**

- 1) Are you guarding me so I cannot perish? **7:12**
- 2) You are frightening me with dreams at night that make me want to die.
7:13-15
- 3) I am not going to live forever anyway, why not let me die now? **7:16**
- 4) Why should God even want me to live, I am nothing but a man. **7:17**
- 5) God’s examination of me and my trials are every morning and every moment.
7:18
- 6) God continually viewed Job and Job could not even swallow outside of God’s presence. **7:19**
- 7) Where have I sinned so that I deserve this? **7:20**
- 8) If I have sinned, why don’t you forgive me? **7:21**

Charles Swindoll: Humiliated by the words of Eliphaz and haunted by God’s silence, Job speaks like a tormented man, here and later. Physically he’s miserable. Emotionally he is at wits’ end. Spiritually he is confused. Just remember, in addition to everything he has lost and all the pain he’s enduring, he has now been blamed and shamed, rebuked in front of others and soundly judged. It’s horrible. There is no other word for it. It’s just horrible.

TEXT: Job 8:1-22

TITLE: BILDAD'S FIRST SPEECH – GOD'S JUSTICE DEMANDS THAT SIN BE THE ISSUE

BIG IDEA:
THE RIGID TRADITIONALIST REMAINS ROOTED IN RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY

INTRODUCTION:

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

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

Roy Zuck: Bildad's harsh words included another heartless hint at Job's losses. The antagonist's attempt to defend God's justice only intensified Job's frustration about the Lord's apparent injustice. Since the sufferer had not sinned, the counselor's words were wasted.

Tremper Longman: Bildad is the second of the three friends to speak to Job. His speech is short but to the point. After upbraiding Job for even attempting to defend himself (v. 2), he then defends God's actions as just by saying that Job's children must have deserved their fate (vv. 3-4). However, for Job there is still hope because he, as opposed to his children, is still alive. Verses 5-7 appeal to Job to turn to God, presumably to repent. If he does so, then he will be restored. His source of authority for his position is the "*former generations*," those who were alive before them (vv. 8-10). They will attest that the godless, if they thrive at all, will do so only temporarily. In the final analysis, the godly thrive and the godless suffer (vv. 11-22).

Charles Swindoll: Following Job's vulnerable and honest response, Eliphaz stepped back. Next in the "tag team match" of philosophers is a man named Bildad. If you think Eliphaz was offensive, just wait until you meet Bildad. Talk about a human

porcupine. . . along comes a second friend, a little younger than Eliphaz, with this insulting remark: “You’re a bag of wind, Job.”

Three Lines of Argument:

- First, The Character of Job (:3-7) (“Look Up, Job!”)
- Second, The Wisdom of the Past (:8-10) (“Look Back, Job!”)
- Third, The Evidence of Nature (:11-19) (“Look Around, Job!”)
- Concluding Comments (:20-22)

(:1) PROLOGUE – BILDAD’S FIRST SPEECH

“Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,”

I. (:2-7) RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY OFFERS JOB A PATH BACK TO PROSPERITY

A. (:2-4) Rebuke of Job’s Claim of Innocence

1. (:2) Your Complaints Lack Substance

*“How long will you say these things,
And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?”*

David Guzik: Bildad was quick to rebuke Job for his strong words, but he did not stop to consider why Job spoke this way. He heard Job’s words, but did not consider his pain.

Robert Alden: Bildad escalated the confrontational nature of the debate with this opening, unsympathetic, accusatory salvo.

David Clines: In describing Job’s words as a “*mighty wind*,” Bildad is not mocking their emptiness, as most suggest (contrast “*words of wind*,” **16:3**), but recognizing them as tempestuous and devastating (cf. “*mighty waters*,” **Isa 17:12; 28:2**). They threaten to uproot cherished beliefs (**Peake**); they make assault upon heaven. Bildad is shocked, not sardonic.

Tremper Longman: **Verse 2b** charges Job with bluster. He speaks many words but says nothing of substance. The wind is something that can be felt but not seen or grasped. That he characterizes his speech as a “*strong*” wind could point to passion or volume or probably both.

2. (:3) Your Complaints Attack the Justice of God

*“Does God pervert justice
Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?”*

David Clines: The rhetorical question conveys Bildad’s surprise and dismay: How could it ever be thought that the Almighty (“*God*” and “*the Almighty*” are in emphatic position in the sentence) could “*pervert*” the right ordering of the world? The moral

universe, in Bildad's theology, is founded upon the principle of **retribution**; any deviation from that would be injustice, and "God and injustice are mutually incompatible terms" (Rowley). Job's protestation of innocence (6:10c) and complaint at God's arbitrary and disproportionate treatment of him (7:12, 17–18, 20) have implicitly charged God with injustice; and even though Job is concerned only with his own case, the whole principle is called into question. Bildad feels his theology endangered, but fails to see it is Job—his integrity, self-esteem, and personhood—that is in danger (cf. Fohrer).

3. (:4) Your Sons Must Have Sinned for Them to be Killed

*"If your sons sinned against Him,
Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression."*

David Clines: This first strophe of Bildad's speech contains its essential point; vv 4–5 are the nodal sentences of the whole. Job's children have sinned; therefore they have been struck dead. Job himself may be innocent; if he is he will be rewarded. The doctrine of retribution is the sole and sufficient explanation of human fortune. . .

The doctrine of retribution is so fundamental to his world-view that he has actually perceived the death of Job's sons and daughters as God's punishment; he does not know he is deceiving himself, he does not know how to distinguish between perception and inference, he does not acknowledge that to deny the universal applicability of retribution is not to deny the righteousness of God (v 3).

Derek Kidner: Where there's smoke, there's fire!

A **rigid application** of a truth, which prevents the possibility of exceptions, or broader analyses of the situation, is a dangerous and cruel line to take. Bildad is a man who has got hold of half of the truth and has made it into the whole truth. It is always a mistake to do that, and always damaging.

B. (:5-7) Repentance Offers Hope of Restoration

1. (:5) Seek God's Compassion

*"If you would seek God
And implore the compassion of the Almighty,"*

David Clines: Job, unlike his sons and daughters, is still alive; as yet therefore there is no evidence that he has sinned irremediably against God. The emphatic "you" (vv 5, 6) stresses the difference between him and his children. Hope need not be lost if he fulfills two conditions: devout prayer and a blameless life (v 6a). The justice of God (v 3) can then be displayed in a positive light.

2. (:6) Straighten Out Your Life

*"If you are pure and upright,
Surely now He would rouse Himself for you
And restore your righteous estate."*

David Thompson: It all sounds so good, so logical, so heavenly, but it is all a lie from hell. Job is not hit with this trouble because of his sin, but because of his faithfulness. He is being attacked by Satan because he is a faithful man of God.

3. (:7) Success and Prosperity Will Follow

*“Though your beginning was insignificant,
Yet your end will increase greatly.”*

John Hartley: Bildad seeks to motivate Job to seek God. He is stating here the positive side of retribution: righteous behavior is rewarded with prosperity. your beginning (*rē'šit*) refers to the first stage of Job's prosperity, and your future (*'aḥarīt*) refers to the last and final segment of his life, beginning with his restoration. These two terms together encompass the totality of his life. Even though Job has lost everything, he will receive a restoration that will far surpass his former greatness. Through Bildad's words the author is hinting at Job's restoration as unfolded in the epilogue (42:10–17). In a few places, the author uses the speeches of the friends to allude to the outcome and thus to heighten the contrast between their pious platitudes and the reality of God's treatment of Job, his faithful servant. The friends will be caught by surprise at the fulfillment of their promises without Job's following the conditions they recommend.

II. (:8-19) EVIDENCE FOR GOD'S JUSTICE IN RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY

A. (:8-10) Argument from Tradition – The Teaching of the Fathers

1. (:8) History Teaches Abiding Lessons

*“Please inquire of past generations,
And consider the things searched out by their fathers.”*

2. (:9) Our Stay on Earth is Very Short

*“For we are only of yesterday and know nothing,
Because our days on earth are as a shadow.”*

Tremper Longman: The fathers' wisdom contrasts with those who are alive at present (v. 9). The present generation is not deep in experience. Today we use the expression “That is so yesterday” to claim that something is obsolete. When Bildad says “*We are yesterday*,” he suggests that there is no significant lived experience behind advice without the precedent of previous generations.

3. (:10) Wisdom Found in the Lessons of History

*“Will they not teach you and tell you,
And bring forth words from their minds?”*

Warren Wiersbe: To be sure, we can today learn from the past, but the past must be a rudder to guide us into the future and not an anchor to hold us back. The fact that something was said years ago is no guarantee that it is right. The past contains as much folly as wisdom.

David Clines: Bildad's respect for the wisdom of the past is admirable, as is his conviction that God does not pervert justice (v 3). It is because he allows the doctrine of retribution to fill the whole horizon both of human wisdom and divine justice that he is both unappealing and unconvincing, and because he insists on absolutizing the doctrine that he must be both unjust and unkind to Job.

John Hartley: If Job is to find restoration, he must cease challenging honored doctrines on the basis of his own experience and develop a listening attitude to the honored teachings of the fathers.

B. (:11-19) Argument from Nature – 3 Analogies

1. (:11-12) Papyrus Plant Analogy – Withering Proves Lack of Water

“Can the papyrus grow up without marsh?

Can the rushes grow without water?

12 “While it is still green and not cut down,

Yet it withers before any other plant.”

Robert Alden: Bildad's point in citing this proverb was that certain conditions must prevail in order for specific results to follow. A second lesson from these swamp grasses is that they are short-lived (8:12). They seem to die in midlife and for no cause. On this point too Bildad was subtly making an application to Job.

David Guzik: Bildad used the example of the growing papyrus to illustrate two things.

- First, it shows the principle of cause and effect, because the water causes it to grow.
- Second, it is a fragile growth that withers before any other plant.

David Thompson: Multiple Illustrations:

1) The illustration from the plant world. 8:11-13

The illustration here is that plants grow as long as there is water, but as soon as water is removed, the plant is scorched and it withers. Bildad's point is, as long as Job was being refreshed by God, everything in his life was fine; but now that he has forgotten about God and sinned against God, his life is scorched and he is withering away.

2) The illustration from the insect world. 8:14

Bildad's point here is that Job is a godless man, so his confidence that he is right with God is as fragile as a spider's web. His confidence is unsupported and unreliable. In other words, Job really doesn't have any solid hope or confidence for deliverance.

3) The illustration from the building world. 8:15

Job had lost all his possessions. Bildad piously refers to not trusting in a house. Since Bildad has lost nothing, it was so easy for him to talk about the fact that any person who puts their trust in a house or holds tightly to their possessions is trusting in the wrong things.

4) The illustration from the vine world. **8:16-18**

A vine thrives in the heat of the sun. It spreads out and wraps itself around rocks and houses. But if the vine is pulled up by the roots, it dries up and the spot ends up denying that a vine ever existed. When a vine is pulled out at the roots, it soon withers and you cannot even tell a vine was ever there. Bildad is saying that Job had once been like a fruitful vine that increased in all areas and directions, but now that he had sin in his life and had been uprooted by a scorching judgment of God, he was nothing anymore. It was like he had never existed.

2. (:13-15) Spider's Web Analogy – False Confidence is Fragile and Inadequate

*“So are the paths of all who forget God,
And the hope of the godless will perish,
14 Whose confidence is fragile,
And whose trust a spider's web.
15 He trusts in his house, but it does not stand;
He holds fast to it, but it does not endure.”*

Poole: A spider's web; which though it be formed with great art and industry, and may do much mischief to others, yet is most slender and feeble, and easily swept down or pulled in pieces, and unable to defend the spider that made it.

David Clines: it is better to see the image of the spider's “house” continuing through this verse (as NIV). It is then self-evident why any confidence on the part of the godless man is disastrously misplaced.

Roy Zuck: Anything such a person may depend on for hope – such as Job's alleged innocence – is as useless and inadequate as leaning on a spider's web.

3. (:16-19) Garden Plant Analogy – Inadequate Root System Produces Only Temporary Results

*“He thrives before the sun,
And his shoots spread out over his garden.
17 His roots wrap around a rock pile,
He grasps a house of stones.
18 If he is removed from his place,
Then it will deny him, saying, 'I never saw you.'
19 Behold, this is the joy of His way;
And out of the dust others will spring.”*

Trevor Longman: The metaphor illustrates the ephemeral nature of the success of the wicked.

Derek Kidner: This gourd (or “vine”) leave no roots once it dies. No tell-tale shoots will appear to remind us that it once existed. Bildad is now making his most cruel attack of all. Job had made the plaintive remark at the close of **chapter 7** that God

would miss him when he was gone. It was his parting host in an attempt to shame the Almighty into treating him better! Bildad cruelly suggests that once he dies, no one will recall his existence – not even God! What faith Job had is systematically attacked.

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

John Hartley: Similarly a wicked person prospers, becoming so deeply rooted in his sphere of influence that it appears that no one can uproot him. But God, at will, forcibly removes him, so that his place, i.e., his estate, which supported his prosperity, disowns him. Thus the fabulous success this wicked person enjoys is illusory and quickly comes to an end.

III. (:20-22) CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION – RETRIBUTION THEOLOGY WILL YIELD FUTURE BLESSING TO THE MAN OF INTEGRITY

A. (:20) God Only Blesses Integrity

*“Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity,
Nor will He support the evildoers.”*

David Clines: To these images of the fate of the wicked is appended now a scene depicting the fate of the innocent, Job himself included. The positive side of the doctrine of retribution is, despite his concentration on the fate of the godless, not ignored by Bildad. Even so, he must begin this brief upbeat movement with a generalizing proverb-like utterance that yet again states the principle in both its positive and negative forms.

John Hartley: The conclusion of the whole matter as taught by the fathers and seen in the ways of nature is that **God never reverses the laws of retribution**. He never perverts justice. Bildad emphasizes this conclusion through use of litotes, the negation of the contrary: God does not reject the blameless (*tām*). They will never experience enduring punishment. Conversely, God does not strengthen the hand of evildoers (*merē'īm*). This means that God does not give the wicked special strength to face difficulties. He does not make them prosperous. Should the wicked rise to power, their success is brief and their fall is certain. On the other hand, it is implied that should the righteous experience hardship, God will come to their rescue. Bildad is vigorously objecting to Job's lamenting. He totally rejects Job's fear that God despises the blameless. This may be another instance where the author has a comforter anticipate what Job is going to ponder (cf. 9:20–22).

B. (:21) God Can Provide Abundant Joy

*“He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
And your lips with shouting.”*

C. (:22) God Can Shame and Subdue Your Enemies

*“Those who hate you will be clothed with shame;
And the tent of the wicked will be no more.”*

Francis Andersen: Those who trust the Lord are like a flourishing plantation beside the irrigation channels (**Ps. 1:3**, reading collectives). The person who trusts in himself is like a stunted desert shrub (**Jer. 17:6**). The jubilation of the blameless man (**verse 20**) will be enhanced by an additional proof of God’s favour, the humiliation of his enemies (**22**).

David Thompson: There are four innuendoes Bildad makes about God and Job:

#1 - God will be happy to replace **Job. 8:19**

Look what Bildad says to Job here—toppling you Job, brings God joy. God finds joy in ruining one man and raising up another. Bildad apparently doesn’t know much about the character of God. God never finds joy in destroying a sinner, He finds joy in saving a sinner.

#2 - God will not reject a man of integrity. **8:20a**

Bildad’s implication is that Job was rejected by God because he was not a man of integrity.

#3 - God will not support the evildoer. **8:20b**

Bildad’s implication is that Job is not receiving any support from God because he is an evildoer.

#4 - God will turn things around for Job if he will repent. **8:21-22**

The implication here is that God could make Job laugh again; God could turn things around for Job if he would just turn from his wickedness and turn to God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you define **Retribution Theology** and what are its limitations?
- 2) What qualities are needed for effective counseling?
- 3) When does reliance upon the wisdom of the past prove inadequate?
- 4) Why are analogies from nature so effective and used extensively in the Scriptures?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

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

An important lesson to be learned from the book is that counselors must not be sacrosanct. They must be willing to listen, become involved, and have respect for the integrity of the human personality they are trying to help. And they must always bear in mind that they may not fully understand the nature of the case.

David Thompson: NO MATTER HOW SPIRITUAL OR SCHOLARLY THE PERSON MAY APPEAR AND SOUND, IF HIS COUNSEL IS NOT TRUE TO THE PLAN OF GOD AND THE FACTS, GOD WILL BE ANGERED AND WILL HOLD THAT PERSON VERY ACCOUNTABLE.

These friends of Job were self-appointed consultants and counselors. In fact, I would say they were satanic counselors designed to get Job to curse God. They were not sent from God. Satan is behind all of these dialogues. We may assume this because of the vision that Eliphaz claimed he received by some spirit being (**Job 4:12-16**). We know that it was not God leading Eliphaz to open his mouth, so it had to have been Satan. So all of these dialogues are satanically motivated.

Don't be shocked to discover that when you are going through tough times, some strange people will call you or visit you to offer their advice. Some of these "friends" may be sent by Satan to actually make your life more miserable. This was certainly true in this case with Job.

John Hartley: A prisoner of tradition, Bildad refuses to allow any experience, particularly Job's, to temper his doctrine. Rather, experience must always be interpreted in the light of known precepts. There can be no exceptions to the precept, for an exception would challenge not only this precept but also the doctrine that God is just, the very cornerstone of orthodox theology. Bildad's error lies in building his entire theology on the premises of the doctrine of retribution, for earthly retribution is not the backbone of divine justice, as the book of Job itself demonstrates.

In his conclusion Bildad offers Job a measure of **hope**. If Job is truly blameless, he will be vindicated and he will experience festive joy again, and, moreover, his enemies will be shamed. This backdoor support, however, is a long way from the commitment to his personal integrity and the rightness of his case that Job so desperately needs. Upset by Job's lament and aware that suffering is evidence of wrongdoing, Bildad definitely rejects Job's argument, but he has not yet decided whether Job is righteous or wicked. Sadly he fails to stand with his friend during the time of his greatest need.

Tremper Longman: 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. Indeed, thanks to the book's prologue, we already know that Job does not suffer because of his sin. Although sin does lead to suffering, it does not always do so right away. Indeed, Samuel-Kings illustrate not simply retribution theology but also delayed retribution. God was patient with his people and often did not punish them right away. Individual sin does not always lead immediately to pain.

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's 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.

Derek Kidner: The traditionalist has spoken. Bildad's cold, analytical, insensitive application of the justice of God has allowed for no possibility that Job may be innocent and still suffer. God's justice demands that he must be guilty. That Job could be suffering for the sake of others, to help not himself as such, but others who find themselves caught up in trouble, is a concept outside Bildad's theological system. As such, the doctrine of the cross would be anathema to Bildad. For a righteous man to suffer in the place of others would, for Bildad, make God unjust. Bildad's theology, though sound in its beginnings, ends up denying the possibility of salvation!

As a counselor, Bildad's methods are cruel in the extreme. For Bildad, Job is nothing but a Pharisee, a whitewashed sepulcher, a hypocrite. That is the unkindest cut of all!

TEXT: Job 9:1 – 10:22

TITLE: JOB'S RESPONSE – LET ME ALONE TO DIE IN PEACE

BIG IDEA:

**DESPAIR OVER INABILITY TO RESOLVE UNDESERVED SUFFERING
RAISES 3 TROUBLING FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS**

INTRODUCTION:

Elmer Smick: In these chapters Job's words move from extolling God (9:1–13)—perhaps as a display of theological acumen to impress the counselors—to blaming God. Would God ever treat him justly? He doubts it (vv.14–31). Does God mock the innocent? Job thinks probably so (vv.21–24). “*If it is not he, then who is it?*” (v.24). These are hard words, but his question instead of a statement implies doubt. These words are followed in vv.32–35 with a yearning for someone strong enough to take up his cause with God. But in **chapter 10** Job decides to plead his own cause and direct all his words to God. How can God, who has created him, want to destroy him—and that without any formal charges?

John Hartley: Job gives vent to the deep agitation of his inner thoughts. In this speech he tends to state a position boldly, then abandon it when he sees its difficulty and jump to another idea, which is also quickly abandoned. Other times he reverts to despair, almost the utter despair of his opening curse-lament (**ch. 3**). His jumping about reflects his frustration at the lack of any insight into the reasons for his plight.

Derek Kidner: Job's grief process reaches another stage here. We have already noted in response to Eliphaz's speech how Job moved on from silence to questioning, to depression and to anger. Now he slides into despair. Job feels powerless and trapped. He has in addition a sense of being persecuted by God, that God is not merely watching him, but watching him with the intent of fastening guilt upon him. Death seems the best option and, in Job's view, it cannot be a long way off. If only God would leave him alone for the last few days of his life, so that he might die in peace, free from his burdens and pain!

David Clines: Viewed from the aspect of function, the speech as a whole has the form of controversy with oneself, Job debating the wisdom or possibility of legal disputation with God (9:2–24), and of reproach against God (9:25—10:22).

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

Parsons: The Book of Job uses legal terms and metaphors extensively in the sections that deal with Job's disputes with God. Job had previously served as a judge in his town

(29:7-17), and he wanted justice (Heb. *mispat*) from God. Therefore he used legal terminology frequently in his dialogues. These legal metaphors are one of the key features of the book, since they help us identify its purpose.

Tremper Longman: In this, Job's second speech in the first cycle, he begins by speaking to the friends about God (9:1–24) and then continues by speaking directly to God (9:25–10:22).

(:1) PROLOGUE – RESPONSE OF JOB

“Then Job answered,”

I. (9:2-13) QUESTION #1 -- HOW CAN A MAN BE INNOCENT BEFORE GOD?

A. (:2) Key Question – How Can a Man Be Declared Innocent?

*“In truth I know that this is so,
But how can a man be in the right before God?”*

Elmer Smick: His opening remark—“*Indeed, I know that this is true*” (v.1)—is a grudging admission that what Bildad has said contains the right theology. After all, Job does share the same basic idea as Bildad and the other three friends—that suffering is the result of sin—though he believes God is unjust to apply it in his case.

Warren Wiersbe: This is not a question about salvation (“How may I be justified?”) but about **vindication** (“How can I be declared innocent?”).

John Hartley: The interrogative indicates that Job does not think there is any likelihood of winning a case against God. Yet his conviction that God does not pervert justice prods him to contemplate the impossible, i.e., of pursuing litigation against God.

David Clines: Job's hopelessness stems not from a sense that God is arbitrary but from a sense of his own powerlessness against the divine decision and his own incapacity to refute the divine judgment (cf. 9:3, 14, 19).

B. (:3-4) God Holds Every Advantage in Any Dispute

1. (:3) No Refuting God in a Debate

*“If one wished to dispute with Him,
He could not answer Him once in a thousand times.”*

Elmer Smick: Job fervently believes that he is innocent of any sin that might warrant the kind of punishment he is enduring. But he is frustrated in his attempt to vindicate himself. God's wisdom is too profound and his power too great for Job to debate in court (9:3–4).

Robert Alden: Job's phrasing of his **frustration** with the divine silence will take many forms. God cannot be found. God will not respond. God always wins any argument. God plays all the roles in the courtroom: accuser, witness, bailiff, jury, and judge. Elsewhere in this chapter Job used such terminology in vv. 14-16, 19-21, 24, 32 and in chap. 10:2, 14-15, 17. At least at this point Job had no lawyer, no advocate, no defender, and no hope.

2. (:4) No Competing with God's Wisdom, Power and Sovereignty

a. God's Wisdom

"Wise in heart"

b. God's Power

"and mighty in strength,"

c. God's Sovereignty

"Who has defied Him without harm?"

Tremper Longman: who can challenge such a powerful God in court concerning the injustice that he is showing Job, and come out unscathed?

C. (:5-10) God's Cosmic Activity Manifests His Unsurpassed Power and Majesty

*"It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how,
When He overturns them in His anger;*

John Hartley: He moves the mountains, which are symbolic of antiquity and stability (cf. Gen. 49:26; Deut. 33:15).

Robert Alden: In this hymn Job made several commendable statements about God's majesty and power, but the point is not so much to give God glory as to paint a backdrop for his own feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. God may be great; but to Job he was removed, unconcerned, unreachable, and incomprehensible. Job had earthquakes in mind and assumed that the accompanying noise and shaking was an evidence of God's wrath.

*6 Who shakes the earth out of its place,
And its pillars tremble;*

John MacArthur: In the figurative language of the day, this phrase described the supporting power that secured the position of the earth in the universe.

*7 Who commands the sun not to shine,
And sets a seal upon the stars;*

*8 Who alone stretches out the heavens,
And tramples down the waves of the sea;*

John Hartley: Each day God stretches out the heavens like a great tent (cf. **Ps. 104:2; Zech. 12:1; Isa. 44:24; 51:13**). This metaphor means that God prepares the heavens as his canopy under which he displays his reign in theophanic splendor. There he manifests his kingly authority: he treads on the back of the sea. Since in the OT the sea is symbolic of chaotic powers hostile to God, this expression means that he has subdued the sea and is its master.

*9 Who makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south;*

*10 Who does great things, unfathomable,
And wondrous works without number.”*

David Guzik: Job praised the great might of God, who created the worlds and put the sun and stars in the sky. Yet the might of God was no comfort to Job; it just made him feel that God was more distant than ever.

John Hartley: God continues to be actively involved within the created order, and all of his wonders bear witness to his wisdom (cf. **Isa. 28:29**). Whereas Eliphaz employed these same lines to God's judicious governance of the world (**Job 5:9**), Job's thoughts gravitate toward God's sheer power and cunning, which may be manifested in remarkable, enigmatic upheavals in nature.

David Clines: Certainly the whole of God's cosmic activity, at creation and in the realm of nature, is viewed by Job entirely from the perspective of how that activity impinges on him. He is not concerned with questions of God's governance of the universe, but wholly with God's treatment of him.

Derek Kidner: Four features of God's innate sovereignty are described.

- God is incomprehensible (**9:10**)
- God is invisible (**9:11; Ex. 33:22-23; 1 Kings 19:12-13**)
- God is unaccountable (**9:12**)
- God is also unrestrainable (**9:13; cf. 26:12**)

Job feels as though every aspect of God's being is now against him. God has withdrawn and in his misery Job feels desperately lonely. No one understands him. There is no one to sympathize, to put their arms around him and comfort him. These are words of utter despair.

D. (:11-12) God's Transcendence Makes Him Unapproachable

*“Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him.*

John Hartley: Even though nature reacts to God's presence with violent upheavals, God himself is not visible in the natural phenomena (cf. **1 K. 19:11-13**). He transcends the elements. As a result, even when God draws near, no human being ever beholds him.

All a person perceives are the effects of God's presence. Consequently, one who has a concern with God does not find any opportunity to speak to or argue with him.

*12 Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
Who could say to Him, 'What art Thou doing?'*

Tremper Longman: He is so powerful and ineffable that no one can question him; even if he carries someone off, no one has the authority, power, or even possibly the opportunity to question him. Job may allude here to the carrying off of his property and his children.

John Hartley: He can take a person without anyone stopping him. No victim can call God's actions into question by asking, *What are you doing?* When a bystander puts such a question to a person, he is challenging the rightness of what that person is doing. He is ordering that person to stop and give an account of his actions. But no one can so challenge God.

E. (:13) God's Angry Opposition Cannot Be Stopped

*"God will not turn back His anger;
Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab."*

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

John Hartley: Proof of God's incontestable might is his victory over the forces of chaos represented by the helpers or cohorts of Rahab. Rahab is one of the monsters along with Leviathan (see 3:8; 40:25–41:26 [Eng. 41:1–34]) and Tannin (see 7:12; 30:29; Gen. 1:21; Ps. 74:13; Isa. 27:1) who were thought to inhabit the depths of the sea. By reason of their role in the myths of Israel's neighbors, in the OT these creatures symbolize the **forces of chaos** in opposition to God. It is always affirmed that God has defeated them as a testimony to the belief that God is master over all cosmic forces, including those that are hostile to his rule.

II. (9:14-35) QUESTION #2 -- HOW CAN I ANSWER GOD IN COURT?

A. (:14-24) No Possibility of a Fair Hearing Before God

1. (:14-19) Interaction Has No Chance of Success

a. (:14-15) Key Question – How Can I Answer God in Court?

*"How then can I answer Him,
And choose my words before Him?"*

*15 For though I were right, I could not answer;
I would have to implore the mercy of my judge.”*

John MacArthur: He means here, not sinless, but having **spiritual integrity**, i.e., a pure heart to love, serve, and obey God. He was affirming again that his suffering was not due to sins he was not willing to confess. Even at that, God found something to condemn him for, he felt, making it hopeless, then, to contend with God.

- b. (:16-18) God is My Attacker – Not a Neutral Arbiter
*“If I called and He answered me,
I could not believe that He was listening to my voice.*

*17 For He bruises me with a tempest,
And multiplies my wounds without cause.*

David Guzik: Job felt that God’s might was against him, not for him. In this sense, it did no good for Job to consider the awesome power of God, because that power seemed to be set against him.

*18 He will not allow me to get my breath,
But saturates me with bitterness.”*

John Hartley: Job intensifies his complaint, declaring that God does not allow him any opportunity for his spirit to be restored. The spirit means his inner resourcefulness and attitudes. He keeps Job in constant emotional turmoil by continually filling him with bitter things. As a result, he is so worn down that he lacks the inner strength to bear himself with dignity. The bitterness that churns deep inside him favors his speeches.

- c. (:19) God is Too Powerful to Be Confronted
*“If it is a matter of power,
behold, He is the strong one!
And if it is a matter of justice,
who can summon Him?”*

David Clines: vv. 17-20 -- Job and God are not equal before the law: God’s assaults upon Job make it impossible for Job to reach even the first phase of a formal attempt to gain vindication. And even supposing a lawsuit could be started, the majesty of God would surely overawe Job into misspeaking himself (v 20).

2. (:20-24) Innocence Has No Value

- a. (:20-21) Vindication is Impossible
*“Though I am righteous,
my mouth will condemn me;
Though I am guiltless,
He will declare me guilty.”*

*I am guiltless;
I do not take notice of myself;
I despise my life."*

Lawson: When Job says he is guiltless, he is not claiming to be sinless. He's not espousing moral perfection. Just relative innocence. He doesn't believe he's done anything to deserve this kind of treatment.

John Hartley: Feeling that he has no possible escape from his anguish, he vents his hatred for life. The oblique, literal language, "*I do not know myself*," may be understood as "*I do not care for myself*." The conviction of his own moral purity does not ease the deep sense of meaninglessness he feels from his anguish, fed by the lack of any sense of God's presence or any insight into his design.

Tremper Longman: As he himself says in **v. 25b**, even though the days go fast, they do not go well. They are filled with pain and distress. Apparently, he both hates his life (**9:21**) and also feels that it passes quickly, but with pain. Both are common reactions to life by those who suffer.

- b. (:22-24) Vengeance of God is Indiscriminate
 - 1) (:22) Charge of Injustice = Destroying All Indiscriminately
*"It is all one; therefore I say,
He destroys the guiltless and the wicked."*

Peter Wallace: This is Job's version of "**common wrath**." Just as there is "common grace" – where the rain falls upon the just and the unjust; so also there is a common wrath: destruction, disaster, calamity – come upon the blameless and the wicked. . .

God's attitude toward humanity is one of **unrelenting hostility**. God destroys the wicked and the blameless together! So what was the point of being blameless?

- 2) (:23) Proof from Calamities
*"If the scourge kills suddenly,
He mocks the despair of the innocent."*
- 3) (:24a) Proof from Oppression
*"The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
He covers the faces of its judges."*
- 4) (:24b) Proof from God's Sovereignty
"If it is not He, then who is it?"

Thomas Constable: Job came to the point of concluding that it did not matter whether he was innocent since God destroys both the guiltless, like himself, and the wicked (**v. 22**). He came very close to accusing God of injustice here. Further evidences of God's

injustice include the facts that innocent people die in plagues (v. 23) and the wicked prosper in the earth (v. 24).

Elmer Smick: All God's sovereign acts are rooted in his righteous character, even when they are outside the bounds of human ability to evaluate them. And that applies especially here as Job struggles to understand.

John Hartley: Given the fact that injustices exist throughout the land and that there is only one God, one can only conclude that God himself is the cause of these injustices. Job's questioning leads him to wonder if God is really just.

David Clines: vv. 21-24 -- Job puts aside for the time being his dream of a satisfactory confrontation with God, and muses on his present sorry state and what it proves about God's attitude to humankind. The facts about Job are two: he is blameless, and he is in despair. A God who can allow that combination of conditions can only be cruelly disposed toward humankind. Two examples follow of how God only exacerbates the misery brought about by natural (v 23) and social (v 24) calamities.

B. (:25-35) Impediments to Removing God's Scourge of Undeserved Suffering

Elmer Smick: Verses 25–31 combine as an expression of deep despair. Job is unable to suck sweetness from a single day; there is not a glimpse of joy, not a smile (v.27), only one unending blur of suffering (v.28). Since God has arbitrarily chosen to treat him as a criminal, what can he do to purge himself (v.29)? Even if he were able to purge himself (v.30), God would plunge him again into a slime pit so that even his clothes would detest him (v.31).

1. (:25-26) Despair of Positive Resolution Due to Brevity of Life – 3 Illustrations of Fleeting Life of Unrelenting Misery – Can't Slow Life Down

- a. (:25) Land – Fast Runner
*“Now my days are swifter than a runner;
They flee away, they see no good.”*
- b. (:26a) Sea -- Speedboat
“They slip by like reed boats,”
- c. (:26b) Air -- Stalking Eagle
“Like an eagle that swoops on its prey.”

John Hartley: Each of these speedy creatures is spurred on by a desired end. But for Job his days are passing by even more swiftly, yet without the hope of any reward at the end that would encourage him to blot out the pain of the journey.

John MacArthur: Couriers running with messages, ships cutting swiftly, and eagles swooping rapidly convey the blur of painful, meaningless days of despair that move by.

David Clines: It has seemed strange to many commentators that so soon after declaring that he cared nothing for his life (v 21), Job should be lamenting the **brevity** of his days. Some have seen in the sudden shift of mood the hand of “a master of the psychology of suffering” (**Terrien**; similarly **Duhm**), others evidence of Job’s inconsistency. But as we have noted on 7:1–3, 6 (and cf. the apparent contradiction of mood between 7:6 and 7:16), the theme of the brevity of life can be employed for various purposes; here the only purpose that blends with the context is uncovered if we regard the phrase “*they have seen no good*” as the **center** of this sketch. The days of one’s life may be expected to yield varying experiences; Job, unlike other people, must affirm that the rapid succession of days that has unfolded before him have brought to him only one experience: **no good**. Every day the same **deprivation of joy** lies in store for him; no matter how quickly one day gives place to the next, the one unvarying aspect marks them all. The theme of this vignette, then, is not the brevity of life as such but the **misery of life** that is in no way relieved by the progression of the days.

2. (:27-28) Positive Thinking Not a Viable Solution – Can’t Escape the Pain

*“Though I say, ‘I will forget my complaint,
I will leave off my sad countenance and be cheerful,’
28 I am afraid of all my pains,
I know that Thou wilt not acquit me.”*

John Hartley: But Job’s resolution comes to a sudden end. His effort at positive thinking falters before a surge of pain. The appalling reality of his pain convinces him that God will not acquit him. No amount of hopeful thinking can calm his thoughts, which are troubled by God’s seemingly capricious power.

3. (:29-31) Pursuit of Holiness Would Be Futile – Can’t Remove the Stench

*“I am accounted wicked,
Why then should I toil in vain?
30 If I should wash myself with snow
And cleanse my hands with lye,
31 Yet Thou wouldst plunge me into the pit,
And my own clothes would abhor me.”*

John Hartley: The word uselessly (*hebel*) means literally “*vapor, mist*,” that which is fleeting, lacking in substance (cf. **Eccl. 1:2**). The word toil (*yāgā’*) stresses the weariness that comes from hard work. The juxtaposing of toil and uselessly captures the despair Job feels when he contemplates taking a strenuous course of action to prove his innocence, a course that seems doomed to fail.

David Guzik: **Spurgeon** saw the washing with **snow water** as a description of the vain things that sinners do to justify themselves and cleanse themselves of their sin.

- Snow water is hard to get, and therefore considered more precious.
- Snow water has a reputation for purity and is thought therefore to be more able to cleanse.

- Snow water comes down from the heavens and not up from the earth and is thought to be more “spiritual.”

Snow water and soap each speak of great effort to be pure. One can use the purest water and the strongest soap, but it is still impossible to cleanse one’s sin by one’s self.

Yet You will plunge me into the pit: The more Job considered the greatness of God, the more he felt plunged into a pit of depravity. God may plunge a man into the pit to see his true sinfulness in many different ways.

- He may bring the memory of old sins to remembrance.
- He may allow the man to be greatly tempted and thus to know his weakness.
- He may reveal to the man how imperfect all his works are.
- He may make the man to understand the spiritual character of the law.
- He may display His great holiness to the man.

David Clines: The image Job uses for God’s expected ignoring of his claim to innocence is a striking one: God will take him, as he stands freshly clean from his washing, and will plunge him mother-naked into a filthy pit or cesspool, so that his very clothes will shun him.

4. (:32-33) Power Disparity But No Mediator – Can’t Connect to God

*“For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him,
That we may go to court together.
33 There is no umpire between us,
Who may lay his hand upon us both.”*

Thomas Constable: Job's **frustration**, expressed in **verses 32-33**, is understandable since God was both his legal adversary and his judge. This accounts for his urgent, yet hopeless, cry for a neutral party (mediator, umpire) to arbitrate a settlement between himself and God. In the ancient Near East this arbitrator was a judge whose verdict was more often a settlement proposal that the litigants could either accept or reject (cf. **13:7-12; 16:18-21**). Job had no hope of receiving justice from God—only mercy (v. **34**). He felt that since God was so great, he could not vindicate himself.

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

David Guzik: We have a great promise of a **Mediator** that Job did not yet know of: *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)*. What Job longed for is fulfilled in Jesus. He fulfills all the qualifications for a mediator, someone to stand between two parties in disagreement:

- The mediator must be accepted by both parties.
- The mediator must be allowed to fully settle the case.
- The mediator must be someone able to relate to both parties.
- The mediator must have the desire to see a happy settlement.

John Hartley: Again Job's reasoning comes up against an insurmountable wall. There is no way for him to settle his complaint with God. Nevertheless, the genuineness of his yearning for God shines through this line. Job is grasping after any means to restore his relationship with God. His sense of meaninglessness before inexplicable suffering is deepened by God's absence from his life. That is why his search for vindication is essentially a search for God again to make himself known to him.

Tremper Longman: Now he thinks once more about going to court with God. Again, however, he recognizes that he is not prepared to go one-on-one with God in court. There is a power disparity. He is not God's equal that they could meet together in court. What Job needs is a mediator, here described as an umpire. The mediator "*would set his hand on both of us*." He would not take sides, but he would even out the playing field. God's rod of punishment was on him, and thus Job was afraid of God, but the "umpire" would remove the rod and the dread. If this were the case, then he could enter into a proper interchange with God. In the end, though, Job recognizes that there is no such umpire ("*though this is not the case with me*").

5. (:34-35) Paralyzed by the Dread of God – Can't Even Express Myself

*"Let Him remove His rod from me,
And let not dread of Him terrify me.
35 Then I would speak and not fear Him;
But I am not like that in myself."*

III. (10:1-22) QUESTION #3 -- WHY WAS I EVEN BORN TO SUCH A CONFUSING EXISTENCE?

David Clines: The structure of these verses is fourfold:

- (1) program for the speech (vv 1–2);
- (2) possible motivations for God's treatment of Job (vv 3–7);
- (3) the contradiction between the apparent and the hidden purpose of God in creating and sustaining Job (vv 8–17);
- (4) appeal for release from God's oppressive presence (vv 18–22).

Thomas Constable: This whole chapter, another prayer (cf. 7:7-21), is a cry to God for answers: "*Let me know why ...*" (v. 2). God's silence intensifies suffering.

Francis Andersen: It is a remarkable fact, apparently unobserved by commentators, but very revealing of Job's mind, that in none of his petitions does he make the obvious request for his sickness to be cured. As if everything will be all right when he is well

again! That would not answer the question which is more urgent than every other concern: **'Why?'**

John Hartley: Job's charges against God flow out of conflicting emotions: fear, frustration, anger, and bitter disappointment. He is revealing his distaste at the way God has allowed him to be tested. Unnerved by God's apparent disloyalty, he feels so disgraced that he cannot even lift up his head in public. He concludes that God is either an incompetent judge or a malicious tyrant bent on torturing him without letting him have any rest, not even in Sheol. But God is such a powerful opponent that Job feels there is no way for his misfortune to be changed.

Tremper Longman: **Chapter 10** begins with Job again talking about how bitter his life has become (**v. 1**), telling the friends that he wants to tell God to stop accusing him (**vv. 2–5**). He believes God is accusing him because God is oppressing him. This connection between his suffering and God's accusation again reveals Job's agreement with the doctrine of retribution. Job believes that God knows that he is innocent but causes him to suffer anyway. God is truly unjust (**vv. 6–7**). Job challenges God's seeming intention to destroy him, a creation of God's own hands (**vv. 8–11**). Job feels that God is after him no matter whether he is righteous or wicked (**vv. 12–15**) and will bring a legal case against him (**vv. 16–17**). Finally (**vv. 18–22**), he beseeches God to leave him alone so he can experience a bit of happiness before he goes to his death, a place of darkness and gloom.

Derek Kidner: In the guise of a courtroom lawyer, he interrogates the Almighty with a series of searching questions.

- Has God taken any delight in Job's downfall? (**10:3**).
- Has God misread the facts? Does He not see Job's innocence? (**10:4**).
- Has God failed to catch the guilty, taking it out on Job instead? (**10:5-6**).
- Does the Creator destroy his creation, even when he has expended such skill in its making? (**10:8-17**)
- Has God really made Job with such singular care and providence, only to stalk him like a lion for not good reason?
- Is Job in the grip of a God who is angry and determined to make Job his target, whether he is guilty or innocent? This is what Job now thinks.

There are no answers: just an empty silence. Job longs that God's attention be diverted from him. He just wants to be left alone. "*Turn away from me,*" he pleads (**10:20**).

A. (:1-2) Confusion Spurs Bitter Complaining from Job

*"I loathe my own life;
I will give full vent to my complaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Let me know why Thou dost contend with me.'"*

David Guzik: The tried saint may ask as Job did, “*Show me why You contend with me.*” **Spurgeon** suggested several answers:

- It may be that God is contending with you to show you His power to uphold you.
- It may be that God is contending with you to develop your graces.
- It may be that God is contending with you because you have some secret sin that is doing you great damage.
- It may be that God is contending with you because He wants you to enter the fellowship of His sufferings.
- It may be that God is contending with you to humble you.

Peter Wallace: When you are at your wits end – and you cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel, (except what appears to be a train barreling down on you!) then continue your complaint to God.

B. (:3-7) Confusion Raises 3 Questions Regarding God’s Judgment of Job

David Clines: vv. 3-7 -- In three questions Job now speculates about the motives that lie behind God’s treatment of him. If God were a human being, his actions would be intelligible, though not necessarily excusable. But Job is convinced enough that God does not act for human reasons. And so the question must be put: Why does God act as if he were a human?

- The first question (:3) asks whether God’s treatment of him is in any way for God’s profit. “*Is it good for you?*”
- The second question (:4) asks whether God has simply the vision and outlook of a mortal, which is necessarily short-sighted and may see error where there is none, or take a small error for a large (**Duhm**).
- The third question (:5-6) asks whether God has so limited an expectation of life, no more than a mere human’s, that he feels himself under pressure of time to discover some fault in Job before he (God) is dead.

1. (:3) Is God Acting Justly?

*“Is it right for Thee indeed to oppress,
To reject the labor of Thy hands,
And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?”*

Tremper Longman: Here he appeals to God by describing himself indirectly as “*the labor of your hands.*” It makes no sense to Job that God would turn against the very creature he had made.

2. (:4) Is God Responding as a Man with Limited Perspective?

*“Hast Thou eyes of flesh?
Or dost Thou see as a man sees?”*

David Guzik: Job clearly knew that God was not limited in His vision as humans are; yet by the facts Job had seen and experienced, it seemed like God saw him with the same shallow and superficial vision that his friends used.

Tremper Longman: In the final series of questions (vv. 4–5), Job raises the possibility that God’s perspective is no better than a human’s. A human perspective is limited, while God’s is supposed to be total. Further, a human is a finite being with a limited life span, whereas God is not bound by birth and death. Humans thus will sometimes or even often misjudge things because of their partial perspective. These limitations should not affect God, but Job is here charging that God’s perspective is limited, and that is why he makes the kinds of misjudgments that Job feels he is making in his case.

3. (:5-6) Is God Rushing to Judgment?

*“Are Thy days as the days of a mortal,
Or Thy years as man’s years,
6 That Thou shouldst seek for my guilt,
And search after my sin?”*

4. (:7) Conclusion: God’s Opposition Doesn’t Make Sense

*“According to Thy knowledge I am indeed not guilty;
Yet there is no deliverance from Thy hand.”*

David Clines: It would be much more comfortable to believe that God had overlooked his suffering, or even that he had made a mistake about Job’s innocence; to believe that God knows he is innocent and punishes him all the same is to feel utterly trapped. To an absent-minded or mistaken God one could appeal, but from one who knows what he is doing there is indeed “*no escape*.”

C. (:8-17) Confusion Regarding God’s Purpose in Creating Job

1. (:8-11) Beauty of Creation

a. (:8) Personal Design Inconsistent with Purpose of Destruction

*“Thy hands fashioned and made me altogether,
And wouldst Thou destroy me?”*

Elmer Smick: Job cannot understand how God, the Creator, who looked on his original creation and considered it good, can turn his back on the work of his hands (v.3). Has not Job dedicated his life to God, in contrast to the wicked who received God’s smile? Job knows that God is not limited like human beings, who have mere eyes of flesh and a certain number of years (vv.4–5). Does God have to search out Job’s faults when he knows that he is innocent (vv.6–7)? Job puts God on the witness stand and plies him with questions. Job cannot understand how the God who so marvelously made him in the womb, who gave him life and showed him such providential care, could be willing to destroy him (vv.8–12).

b. (:9-11) Three Supporting Images of the Artistry of the Creator – Inconsistent with Purpose of Destruction

1) (:9) Image of Potter Shaping the Clay

*“Remember now, that Thou hast made me as clay;
And wouldst Thou turn me into dust again?”*

2) (:10) Image of Cheesemaker

*“Didst Thou not pour me out like milk,
And curdle me like cheese;”*

David Guzik: Perhaps the most interesting among these three is the idea of man being like a cheese. Some commentators see this as reference to man’s humble state: “Man is a very mean thing in his first conception, modestly here set forth by the making of cheeses.” (Trapp) Yet other commentators see a reference here to the act of **conception**: “Thus he modestly and accurately describes God’s admirable work in making man out of a small and liquid, and as it were milky, substance, by degrees congealed and condensed into that exquisite frame of man’s body.” (Poole) In fact, **Adam Clarke** explained the meaning of **Job 10:10** only in Latin because he felt so awkward with the subject matter; after his explanation he wrote, “I make no apology for leaving this untranslated.”

Tremper Longman: That semen is a milky fluid may be behind **v. 10a**. The semen coalesces or congeals (curdles) into a solid, “*like cheese*,” suggesting the embryo. Job questions God in such a way as to again remind him that he is God’s own creation. This embryo is clothed with skin and holds together with bones and sinews. See **Ps. 139:13** for a similar idea of the “*knitting together*” of human beings.

Robert Alden: The verse impinges on the abortion debate because it suggests that from the point of conception Job was a person for whom God cared.

3) (:11) Image of Weaver

*“Clothe me with skin and flesh,
And knit me together with bones and sinews?”*

2. (:12) Blessing of Providential Preservation

*“Thou hast granted me life and lovingkindness;
And Thy care has preserved my spirit.”*

David Guzik: In **Job 10:12**, Job actually thanked God for three wonderful things:

- Life (*You have granted me life*).
- Divine Favor (*You have granted me... favor*).
- Divine Visitation (*Your care has preserved my spirit*).

3. (:13-17) Bitterness of Present Distress

a. (:13) Present Confusion over God's Purposes in Afflicting

*"Yet these things Thou hast concealed in Thy heart;
I know that this is within Thee."*

Elmer Smick: The NIV takes **v.13** with what follows, but some do not agree (cf. **Andersen**, 153–54). If the NIV is correct, then in **v.13** Job is saying that God brought him into being so that he might hound him over his sin and let no offense go unpunished. It seems that Job is saying that it does not make any difference whether he is innocent or guilty because he is full of shame and drowned in affliction anyway (**vv.14–15**). No matter how much he tries to assert his integrity, it seems that God insists on stalking Job like a lion, showing his awesome power in wave after wave of oppression (**vv.16–17**).

b. (:14) Acceptance of Link between Sin and Suffering

*"If I sin, then Thou wouldst take note of me,
And wouldst not acquit me of my guilt."*

c. (:15-16) Resistance to God's Opposition to the Innocent

*"If I am wicked, woe to me!
And if I am righteous, I dare not lift up my head.
I am sated with disgrace and conscious of my misery.
And should my head be lifted up,
Thou wouldst hunt me like a lion;
And again Thou wouldst show Thy power against me."*

Tremper Longman: Job has felt attacked by God. That is why he believes he suffers such horrible afflictions. Job here uses a series of different comparisons to describe God's assault. The first is that of a **lion**: God will show his terrible power against Job like a lion attacking his prey. In **Ps. 7** the psalmist appeals to God to protect him against the lions that attack. In the psalm, the lions represent the wicked who unjustly attack the psalmist (see **vv. 1–2**). The lion also represents the violence and power of the wicked in **Pss. 10:9; 17:12; and 91:13** (here God will give the psalmist the ability to trample down the lions). But Job is not the only one to use the lion metaphor to describe God's judgment. Both Hosea (**5:14; 13:7–8**) and Amos (**3:4, 8; 5:19**) picture God executing his judgment against his people as a lion rends its prey.

d. (:17) Lament over Unrelenting Divine Attacks

*"Thou dost renew Thy witnesses against me,
And increase Thine anger toward me,
Hardship after hardship is with me."*

John Hartley: Job laments God's continuous and mighty effort to increase his suffering. He complains that God keeps sending fresh witnesses to testify to his guilt. Each new complication in his illness serves as a witness of his guilt. Like a general who keeps ordering fresh troops into the fray against his foe, God gives Job no moments of relief.

God multiplies his anger against Job by sending reinforcements of troops against him. Job feels that his situation is hopeless before such a great general. God's hostility overwhelms him.

D. (:18-22) Confusion Cannot be Resolved so Job Desires to Be Left Alone to Die in Peace

Robert Alden: This section is replete with thoughts on death, disorder, and darkness.

1. (:18-19) Why Did You Bring Me Out of the Womb?

*“Why then hast Thou brought me out of the womb?
Would that I had died and no eye had seen me!
19 I should have been as though I had not been,
Carried from womb to tomb.”*

2. (:20-22) Why Can't You Leave Me Alone to Die in Peace?

*“Would He not let my few days alone?
Withdraw from me that I may have a little cheer
21 Before I go-- and I shall not return—
To the land of darkness and deep shadow;
22 The land of utter gloom as darkness itself,
Of deep shadow without order, And which shines as the darkness.”*

Robert Alden: Job's complaint ends with a thesaurus of terms for darkness.

Tremper Longman: Since he believes that his suffering is caused by God, he beseeches God to back off and give him room to have just a little pleasure in the few days that remain to him.

David Clines: Like other speeches of Job's, this one comes to an end with a prospect of death. Here the particular characteristic of death is not that it provides a release from pain (as in **3:20–22**) or as a permanent hiding from God (as in **7:21b**), but that it envelops one in darkness (see **H. Ringgren**, TDOT 5:255–56). Job has cried out for darkness (*“Would that I had died before any eye had seen me,”* v **18b**); he knows that darkness is for the moment denied him. But he desires the darkness; life before death can be “comfortable” only if God's gaze can be turned away from him (v **20b**), if he can secrete himself from the glare of the divine attention or rather inquisition.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do we respond when we don't understand God's purposes for a certain season of life?

2) What tactics are used by Satan to instill doubt and cause us to question God's goodness?

3) How can we be assured that God is always on our side and not our enemy?

4) Why didn't Job contemplate suicide?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: EVEN THOUGH JOB HAD SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND A SERIOUS DISCUSSION WITH GOD ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE STILL MAINTAINED FAITH IN HIS OWN INNOCENCE AND IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY.

I love this about Job. He was not about to admit he was guilty just because everyone else said he was. Job was not afraid to admit he was a sinner and he was not afraid to die. But he would not admit that all of this was happening to him because of some secret sin or evil that was in his life. He was not about to admit he had done something to bring this all on. He had not committed some evil that deserved this.

Job gives eleven descriptions of the sovereignty of God:

- God is so sovereign, man cannot answer Him. **9:3b**
- God is so sovereign, man cannot defy Him. **9:4**
- God is so sovereign that He can collapse mountains. **9:5**
- God is so sovereign that He can cause earthquakes. **9:6**
- God is so sovereign that He commands light. **9:7**
- God is so sovereign that He controls the heavens and seas. **9:8**
- God is so sovereign that He controls the constellations. **9:9**
- God is so sovereign that He does innumerable, unfathomable and wonderful things. **9:10**
- God is so sovereign that He is invisible. **9:11**
- God is so sovereign that He is unstoppable. **9:12**
- God is so sovereign that His anger is immutable. **9:13**

MY LIFE IS IN THE SOVEREIGN HANDS OF THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND EVEN THOUGH I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME, I WILL HONOR HIM AND NOT CURSE HIM; BUT I WILL DEFEND MYSELF AGAINST FALSE ACCUSATIONS AND TALK TO GOD.

John Hartley: Job is experiencing the full brunt of God's anger. He is certain, however, that God is punishing him wrongly and unjustly. God, the plaintiff, has failed to inform Job, the defendant, of his accusation. If a defendant is not informed in a reasonable

amount of time, he has the right to take his accuser to court and demand a resolution. The possibility of exercising his rights as a defendant dominates Job's thinking in this speech. He begins by contemplating the vast power and wisdom of his adversary. This leads him to fear that even if he should have the chance to dispute his case before this mighty God, the One who has mastery over all the forces in the universe, God would easily win. No matter what tactic he might choose, God would be too strong. If it were a contest of strength, God would overpower him. If it were a court case, God would out-argue him. Dismayed and despondent, Job accuses God of ruling unjustly and then expresses his hatred of his own life. . .

Finding no hope in seeking a legal settlement, Job turns to lament his plight. He pleads for God to show him mercy. He reminds God of his obligations as his Creator. God is responsible to sustain each of his creatures. Furthermore, he cannot demand more from a human being than the way he has made him, merely a fragile ceramic vessel. Moving from his thoughts about God's responsibilities as Creator, Job requests that God might ease his suffering in order that he might enjoy his few remaining days before he descends to the realm of total darkness.

For the first time Job speaks as though he wants to come to grips with his situation. A thin ray of hope shines out of his despair as he begins to search in earnest for some way to face God and win a public acquittal. But the way God is treating him causes him to question God's commitment to justice. This struggle in his mind between the God of justice and the afflicting God will dominate his speeches. That is why the legal metaphor will become more prominent in the coming speeches until Job swears his oath of innocence (**ch. 31**). Job knows that he must win acquittal in order to find renewed fellowship with God and a meaningful life.

David Clines: The language of this address has been rich in the metaphors of legal disputation. Job has—hesitatingly and adventurously—contemplated means of winning legal vindication from God. The futility of the undertaking becomes only the more apparent as the speech progresses, so that it may appear that the whole subject is in danger of coming to a complete dead-end.

Something is in motion, however; and that is Job's growing recognition of the divine hostility. What thwarts Job's ambitions, he comes to recognize in this speech, is not so much the majesty and omni-competence of God which dooms any attempt to compel him, but the divine anger that cannot be deflected, a studied hostility that flings into battle against Job all the resources of a God.

On the level of rationality, then, the whole line of approach toyed with by Job in this speech—a legal confrontation on a grand scale—seems to fall to the ground, and only a mood of sour resignation can be expected to survive. But on the level of feeling, the conflict has only just begun; for the fact is that, for the first time, Job has brought to the surface his sense of the anger of God. And that anger, whether or not it is a reality, must be met by a radical anger within Job. Intellectually the game may be at stalemate; but emotionally everything is still at stake.

Charles Swindoll: Clearly, Job knows how great God is. What he longed for was an audience with Him. . .

There are four lines of questions that follow. Keep in mind, Job has in the back of his mind, his appearing before God in a legal-type setting. He would love to be able to step into a divine courtroom and stand before the Judge, the Lord God. He longs to walk in just as he is, covered with these sores, bankrupt and broken, and argue his case. Not to be a rebel, but simply to be in the same room, face to face, where they could talk all this through. He would come with four questions.

- If I could stand before God, what would I say? (9:14-19)
- If I could declare my own innocence, what good would it do? (9:20-24)
- If I tried to be positive and cheerful, how would that help me? (9:25-31)
- Is it possible to have a mediator who could represent my needs before God? (9:32-35)

G. Campbell Morgan: The cry of Job was born of a double consciousness which at the moment was mastering him; first, that of the appalling **greatness** and **majesty** of God; and secondly, that of his own **comparative littleness**. This was not the question of a man who had dismissed God from his life and from the universe, and was living merely upon the earth level. It was rather the cry of a man who knew God, and was overwhelmed by the sense of His greatness. . .

Over against that was the sense of his own comparative smallness. He felt he could not get to this God. He was altogether too small. . .

It is as though Job had said: There is no umpire, there is no arbiter, there is not one who can stand between us, interpreting each to the other; me to God, and God to me. There is no one to lay his hand upon us. . .

Here then was Job crying out for someone who could stand authoritatively between God and himself, and so create a way of meeting, a possibility of contact.

We now turn from the elemental cry of Job, and from the Old Testament, to consider the apostolic word concerning Jesus, "*There is one Mediator between God and man.*" That is the Gospel in brief. That is Christianity fundamentally.

TEXT: Job 11:1-20

TITLE: ZOPHAR'S FIRST SPEECH – MISAPPLYING GOOD THEOLOGY

BIG IDEA:

**SUFFERING MUST INDICATE SECRET SINS THAT DEMAND
REPENTANCE BECAUSE GOD KNOWS ALL IN HIS SECRET WISDOM**

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: The three-strophe structure corresponds to the content of the speech: in vv 2–6 Zophar reproaches Job for his claim to innocence; in vv 7–12 he affirms the inscrutability of God; in vv 13–20 he counsels Job on the right way to behave and offers him hope if he will take Zophar's advice. . .

As for genre, the chapter is evidently a **disputation speech**, as several features make clear.

- First, Zophar accuses his opponent of long-windedness and filibustering; Job's speech is empty of content, yet at the same time constitutes blasphemy ("mockery") (vv 2–3).
- Second, he quotes words of his opponent (v 4) in order to refute them.
- Third, he cites authority for his case over against Job: the traditional teaching about the wisdom of God in which, Zophar presumes, lies hidden the reason for Job's suffering (vv 5–6).
- Fourth, he interrogates Job in the style of a cross-examination, asking questions which cannot fail to leave Job in the wrong.

Other genre elements drawn upon, as so often in these speeches, are **hymnic**, **wisdom**, and **prophetic** elements. . .

The nodal verses are evidently vv 6c and 15. In v 6c is contained the essence of Zophar's view of Job's guilt: it is not less than it appears, but worse, and if God were not so merciful Job would be suffering even more severely than he is at this moment. V 15 is nodal because it encapsulates Zophar's recommendation to Job and at the same time holds out promises of how different his future can be from his present state.

John Hartley: Zophar bears the least status, for he delivers only two speeches. His speech is thus far the most poignant, offering Job little comfort except for the elaborate picture of the repentant sinner's peaceful security. Since in Zophar's view people are either contrite worshipers of God or arrogant sinners, he sees little possibility that such a wordy man as Job might be upright, free from wrong. With no apparent sympathy for Job's lament, he coldly reasons that Job's present punishment is only partial, tempered by God's abundant mercy. But he offers Job the promise that if he repents and turns to God with a single mind, he will again enjoy a secure, rich life.

Tremper Longman: In his estimation, Job is full of words that have no substance. Zophar is upset with Job's claim that he is without error and without sin. He wishes that God would put him in his place (vv. 4–6). God will come and put Job in his place (see 38:1–42:6), but not for the reasons that Zophar believes. According to Zophar, God is ineffable and mysterious. This inspires Zophar (11:7–11) but irks Job (see 9:11–14). Zophar is convinced without a shadow of doubt that God will punish evil people; but in an indirect barb at Job (v. 12), he says that foolish people do not get it and never will. That said, Zophar lays out hope for Job: repent. If Job repents, then he will be fully restored. If he does not, then he will perish like all the wicked (see vv. 13–20). . .

While Zophar could not be more right in principle, he was totally wrong in his application of the principle to Job. Zophar demonstrates the dangers of a dogmatic, unreflective theology that does not take into account people's actual situation.

Elmer Smick: Zophar considers Job's words pure mockery (vv.2–3), for he thinks Job is claiming flawless doctrine and sinless perfection (v.4). Job steadfastly maintains his innocence or blamelessness in contrast with wickedness (9:22), but he does not claim to be perfect (7:21). He does, however, feel that God has treated him much worse than he deserves. Though he complains bitterly of the treatment God appears to be giving him, to this point he has not been particularly sarcastic nor has he mocked God or even ridiculed his friends. He has accused them of being shallow in their arguments and callous in the way they have dealt with him (6:24–27).

Charles Swindoll: Job's third friend is your classic **legalist**. His tone and his words are saturated with abrasive legalism.

- “You are guilty, Job” (11:1-4).
- “You are ignorant, Job” (11:5-12)
- “You are sinful, Job” (11:13-20).

Guard against judgmental generalizations. Zophar would have been wise to get his facts straight before he took on a man as faithful as Job.

(:1) PROLOGUE

“Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,”

I. (:2-6) REBUKE OF JOB FOR SECRET SINS – BABBLING WITHOUT WISDOM

A. (:2-4) Rebuke for False Protestations

*“Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,
And a talkative man be acquitted?
3 Shall your boasts silence men?
And shall you scoff and none rebuke?”*

*4 For you have said, 'My teaching is pure,
And I am innocent in your eyes.'"*

David Clines: If no one takes up God's cause, says Zophar, Job will continue his mockery of the divine honor (v 3), protesting both to humans (v 4a) and to God (v 4b) that it is he—and not God—who is in the right.

David Thompson: Zophar feels compelled to speak. You can tell what kind of insensitive man he is by what he says at the beginning. He thinks he has figured it all out. He makes a series of four accusations against Job:

Accusation #1 - Zophar accuses Job of being too talkative. **11:2**

Accusation #2 - Zophar accuses Job of being a braggart. **11:3**

Accusation #3 - Zophar accuses Job concerning his teaching. **11:4a**

Accusation #4 - Zophar accuses Job of saying he is innocent. **11:4b**

B. (:5-6) Rebuke for Resisting God's Secret Wisdom

*"But would that God might speak,
And open His lips against you,
6 And show you the secrets of wisdom!
For sound wisdom has two sides.
Know then that God forgets a part of your iniquity."*

David Clines: The secret wisdom of God, with which he could put Job in his place, is a rather open mystery. For Zophar knows it, and he here communicates it to Job. It is that God, being merciful as well as just, allows his mercy to temper his just retribution against sinners. The balance between mercy and justice is not for humans to determine, however; it lies in the unfathomable freedom of God to "*pass over*" transgression and not exact the full punishment that is deserved (cf. **Amos 7:1–9; Mic 7:18; Ezek 11:3; 20:17; Jer 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; 46:28; Ezra 9:13**).

John Hartley: When God speaks, he will make known to Job the secrets of wisdom. The secrets (*ta 'alumôt*) refer to what God knows but human beings do not. God will speak the full scope of sound wisdom (*tûšîyâ*). This wisdom is twofold (*kiplayim*). Here twofold connotes the fullness or totality of a matter (cf. **Isa. 40:2**). Possibly wisdom is viewed as consisting of two sides, a revealed side manifest in creation and a hidden side which God keeps with himself (**Pope**). When God would converse with Job, he would draw on the full scope of wisdom in order to make Job see the errors in his rhetoric.

Tremper Longman: In vv. 5–6 Zophar wishes that God would speak to the issue. He desires God to speak because he is confident of what God would say and that God would take his side in exposing Job's impurity. God's wisdom is deep and profound. Job believes that God is making him suffer disproportionately to his sin. Zophar responds by arguing that God has even forgotten some of Job's sin. Zophar would not take the word "forgotten" in its superficial meaning, but rather in the sense that God is not acting on all of Job's sins. In sum, Zophar tells Job that he deserves worse than he is

getting! Rather than being brutal and cruel in Job's situation, God is actually being quite compassionate.

II. (:7-12) INSCRUTABILITY OF GOD'S SECRET WISDOM

David Guzik: Zophar Teaches Job Theology

a. *Can you search out the deep things of God:* After instructing Job in the doctrine of total depravity, Zophar went on to teach Job about the **transcendence** of God.

Therefore, in Zophar's thinking, Job was wrong to question God.

b. *Who can hinder him:* The next lesson in Zophar's theology was the **sovereignty** of God. Zophar believed that the best thing Job could do was to accept his punishment from God instead of protesting the injustice of it. In Zophar's mind, Job's punishment was just, and God was actually giving Job less than he deserved.

c. *He knows deceitful men; he sees wickedness also.* Will He not then consider it: Zophar here implied that what Job wanted was for God to turn His head aside from justice. Zophar wanted Job to know that it was wrong – and wicked – to wish that God would not consider the deceit and wickedness of man; in this case, Job's deceit and wickedness.

Derek Kidner: Zophar launches into a hymn on the sovereign wisdom of God. “*Can you fathom the mysteries of God?*” he asks (11:7). . . According to Zophar, sin is sin, and however much mercy has tempered justice, justice is still the principle on which the universe runs. God is the regulator of retribution. God knows who is guilty and who is not? And Job is guilty – he must be!

The hymn itself is sound enough:

1. God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond human comprehension. They go beyond all the realms of the created universe (11:8-9).

2. God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond human comprehension. His ways are “*past finding out.*” God knows sins that Job either does not remember or refuses to acknowledge.

3. God's wisdom and knowledge ensure that justice will be seen to be done: God will bring the guilty to book (11:10-11).

All this is true, of course, but where is Job the sufferer in all of this? As George Philip comments, “There may be some truth in Zophar's sermon to Job, but there is certainly no humanity in it, and remember it is spoken to a man of ripe years whose heart has been laid bare by suffering.”

A. (:7-9) God's Secret Wisdom Cannot be Discovered

*“Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?
8 They are high as the heavens, what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?
9 Its measure is longer than the earth,
And broader than the sea.”*

David Clines: Zophar’s theological standpoint is quite distinctive. Where Bildad had appealed to the impossibility of God’s perverting justice (8:2) and Eliphaz had appealed to the impossibility of a mortal’s being entirely righteous in the sight of one’s maker (4:17), Zophar appeals to the impossibility of fathoming the divine knowledge (11:6–9).

John Hartley: Zophar is stressing God’s inexhaustible wisdom. God’s knowledge extends far beyond every boundary in the created order. The vastness of creation is expressed by the four dimensions—height, depth, length, and breadth—in relationship to four comprehensive geographical terms—heaven and Sheol (which are frequently parallel; cf. Ps. 139:8), and earth and sea (an infrequent pair). God, being higher than the heavens and deeper than the lowest part of the universe, transcends the extraterrestrial realm. The created order, though too large for a human being to explore its extremities, is too small to house God.

In relationship to these extremities Job is asked, what can you do ... what can you know? The meaning of *know* (*yādaʿ*) here goes beyond rational knowledge to include the ability to act on that knowledge. That is why it parallels *do* (*pāʿal*). There is nothing Job can do or know that could ever approach, let alone challenge, God’s knowing or doing. How then can Job entertain the idea that he could dispute his case with God?

B. (:10-12) God’s Secret Wisdom Knows Your Secret Sins

*“If He passes by or shuts up,
Or calls an assembly, who can restrain Him?
11 For He knows false men,
And He sees iniquity without investigating.
12 And an idiot will become intelligent
When the foal of a wild donkey is born a man.”*

David Clines: The crucial fact is, for Zophar, that no matter how great or how small Job’s sin is—and it is no doubt greater than Job imagines—it is sin. And however much mercy has tempered justice, justice is still the principle upon which the moral universe runs, and God is fundamentally the regulator of retribution. Zophar embarks upon this *topos* (vv 7–12) on the unfathomable wisdom of God with one particular aspect of God’s wisdom specifically in mind: God knows who is guilty and who not. Whether God knows absolutely everything is neither here nor there at the present moment for Zophar—though his language is of the most extreme generality; what matters is that God has an unerring ability to ferret out wrongdoing. And that means, when the

generalities have been stripped down, that God knows that Job is a guilty man despite Job's every protestation (v 4). . .

Proverbial saying -- we seem to have two statements of impossibility which we could well represent as RSV does: "*A stupid man will get understanding, when a wild ass's colt is born a man*"—"when pigs fly," -- an "*empty*" man will as soon gain understanding as a wild ass be a tame donkey.

John Hartley: Indeed, he knows false men. Here knows (*yāda'*) means both that God sees their wrongdoing and that he executes judgment on them. The phrase false men is literally "*men of nothingness*" (*metê šāw*), those who have no moral scruples. Zophar denounces Job's thought that since God acts capriciously in the way he arrests people, he needs to be stopped and called to give an account of his actions (9:12). Specifically he rejects wholeheartedly this description of God's acting as a possible explanation of Job's plight. Rather he believes that God has passed Job's way and has imprisoned him with illness for some secret sin. Since God knows false men, it is impossible from Zophar's perspective that God could have acted wrongly in afflicting Job. . .

The proverb then says that as it is impossible for a donkey to be sired by a wild ass, so it is impossible for a stubborn person to become truly wise by his own efforts. With this proverb Zophar says that there is no natural way for Job to be changed from a stupid man to a wise man. Or referring back to v. 4, it is utterly impossible that Job, a mere man, could be morally pure in God's sight. Therefore, the only way for him to approach God will be the way of repentance, not the way of a legal dispute.

Tremper Longman: Zophar concludes this section with one of the most biting insults of the book (v. 12). We can imagine him looking into Job's face with disdain and saying these words. He delivers the line as a kind of general principle ("proverb-like"), but in the context of the debate, it is clear that it is a barb aimed at Job. The upshot is that it is more likely that a donkey will give birth to a human child than that an empty-headed person, like Job in Zophar's estimation, will give birth to a correct insight. In other words, Job is a fool and his ideas are foolish. However, as we will learn in the next section, he is not beyond redemption. He is not morally bankrupt; it is his present train of thinking that is troubled.

III. (:13-20) CALL FOR REPENTANCE

Francis Andersen: So much for Zophar's lecture. Now he **preaches**. His remedy is simple: the usual string of pious advice. 'If you get your thinking straight, and say your prayers,' and so on. . . Let us assume that Zophar is trying to be helpful in his blundering way. The prophets say the same kind of thing quite effectively (cf. **Isa. 1:15**). But this is too glib; and it is off base, because it assumes that Job's problem is his sin. Zophar falls into the common evangelistic error of applying the categories of guilt and pardon to every human problem. This is not what Job needs.

A. (:13-16) Methodology of Repentance – How to Repent

*“If you would direct your heart right,
And spread out your hand to Him;
14 If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away,
And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents.
15 Then, indeed, you could lift up your face without moral defect,
And you would be steadfast and not fear.
16 For you would forget your trouble,
As waters that have passed by, you would remember it.”*

John Hartley: vs. 13 -- Zophar exhorts Job, *prepare your heart*. “Preparing the heart” (*hākîn lēḥ*) means to make it firm or constant for belief. This expression stands parallel to “trust” (*bāṭaḥ*) in Ps. 78:8, 37; 112:7 -- spread out your hands to him. His changed inner attitude is to be attested by spreading out his hands (*kap*) to God in earnest supplication.

Tremper Longman: vv. 15-19 -- Here the restoration is described not in materialistic terms but rather in terms of one’s **psychological state**. If Job follows Zophar’s prescription, then he will have a new confidence that expels the fear and anxiety that he presently experiences. Trouble will be a thing of the past (v. 16). Darkness will give way to light. Insecurity will give place to security. Indeed, because of this newfound hope, people will come and will request Job’s favor (v. 19b).

B. (:17-20) Motivation for Repentance – Benefits of Repentance

*“And your life would be brighter than noonday;
Darkness would be like the morning.
18 Then you would trust, because there is hope;
And you would look around and rest securely.
19 You would lie down and none would disturb you,
And many would entreat your favor.
20 But the eyes of the wicked will fail,
And there will be no escape for them;
And their hope is to breathe their last.”*

David Clines: What is the connection of the picture of **security** (vv 18–19a) with that of the image of the revered patriarch being flattered and deferred to (v 19b)? It must be that security for a princeling or sheikh like Job and his friends cannot consist in the mere absence of assault upon one’s property or person, but must also involve the **esteem** of those whom they have been accustomed to leading. Job suffers at the moment not only from the assaults of Sabeans and Chaldeans (1:15, 17) but from the disgrace into which his afflictions have cast him (cf. his own description of his disgrace in 30:1–15 compared with his former standing [29:7–17]). **There is no security without honor**, without full appreciation of one’s rank and quality. It is therefore climactic in Zophar’s depiction of the good fortune that awaits a truly converted Job that “*many will seek your favor*,” lit. “*will make soft, or, sweet, your face*.” The idiom is found in Prov 19:6 (“*Many seek the favor of a generous man*”) while Ps 45:13 [12]

(“*The people of Tyre will entreat your favor with gifts*”) reminds us that oriental flattery is not merely a verbal matter, but includes the **presentation of gifts as tokens of esteem** (a practice frequently misunderstood by westerners as “bribery”). The phrase is used also of entreating the favor of God (e.g., **Exod 32:11; Jer 26:19; 1 Kgs 13:6**) and here also the giving of gifts (sacrifices) is sometimes explicit (**1 Sam 13:12; Mal 1:9**). At Job’s restoration, indeed, such a scene will be enacted, with all his relatives and acquaintances bringing gifts as tokens of congratulation and also, no doubt, as a means of self-ingratiation (**42:11**). No one becomes prosperous through the gifts of such clients (in **42:10** Job had already had his fortunes restored to twice their former worth before the arrival of the *bakshish* money), but they are the icing on the cake for the man of wealth and dignity, and more: they are the outward and visible sign of social worth—which is what everyone wants, but Job more than most, considering that he has started at the top of the social ladder.

John Hartley: v. 17 -- Job’s life then will be as bright as the sun at high noon. His season of darkness will be turned to joy just as the morning sun dispels the night and inspires hope for a bright new day. This is similar to the words of the psalmist: “[*God*] shall bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday” (**Ps. 37:6**). Light shining on a person’s life brings warmth, buoyancy, and a sense of well-being. The word for life (*heled*) stresses its longevity. Job is being promised a long, enriched life. This picture of brightness contrasts markedly with Job’s gloomy description of his fate in death at the end of his last speech (**10:20–22**).

vv. 18–19 -- In his new life Job will have inner peace. He will have a strong sense of security because he will have genuine hope. Whereas now Job dreads the future, his hope will inspire him to anticipate the future with joy. Then he may look about with confidence. Like a sheep lying peacefully in a pasture guarded by a shepherd, Job will then be able to lie down and rest without any fear that someone will terrify him. Zophar is directly countering Job’s complaint that God is hunting him like a lion (**10:16**) with the promise that in the future God will lead and protect him like a shepherd. When he has peace with God, many will court his favor (*hillû pānêkâ*, **v. 19b**). This Hebrew phrase, usually translated “to appease” or “to entreat the favor of,” means literally either “to make the face smooth through stroking” or “to sweeten the face.” . . Entreaty is one way an inferior party seeks to win the favor of his superior. This language then means that Job will again stand at the head of his community and be accorded the highest honor.

Warren Wiersbe: But if Job wanted these blessings, he had to get them on Zophar’s terms. Yes, there was hope, but it was hope with a condition attached to it: Job must repent and confess his sins (**vv. 13–14**). Zophar is tempting Job to bargain with God so he can get out of troubles. This is exactly what Satan wanted Job to do! “*Doth Job fear God for nothing?*” Satan asked (**1:9**). Satan accused Job of having a “commercial faith” that promised prosperity in return for obedience. If Job had followed Zophar’s advice, he would have played right into the hands of the enemy.

Job did not have a “commercial faith” that made bargains with God. He had a **confident faith** that said, “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him*” (13:15). That doesn’t sound like a man looking for an easy way out of difficulties. “Job did not understand the Lord’s reasons,” said C.H. Spurgeon, “but he continued to confide in His goodness.” That is faith!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we discern whether counsel that is rooted to some extent in biblical theology actually applies to our set of circumstances?
- 2) What should be the value to us of the doctrine of the inscrutability of God?
- 3) Under what circumstances should we call on people to repent?
- 4) When we are unjustly attacked, how do we protect against caving in to popular pressure?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Derek Kidner: According to Eliphaz, initially at least, Job is a **slight sinner**. . . Job must be one of the innocent: his sin must therefore be trivial and his suffering will be over soon. . . Job is essentially a righteous man temporarily chastised by God (5:17-18) for some imperfection inevitable in any mortal (4:17). . .

According to Bildad, Job is a **serious sinner**. . . Job’s sin is serious, though evidently not as serious as that of his sons; he may yet have cause, so Bildad thinks, to hope. If he proves to be innocent, he will be rewarded.

According to Zophar, Job is a **secret sinner**. Since Job refused to acknowledge his sin (11:4) it follows that Job must be a secret sinner (11:5-6). . . God’s omniscience ensures that nothing escapes his knowledge. . .

Zophar’s handling of this truth [doctrine of retribution – including both curses and blessings] is misguided for at least three reasons:

- Firstly, God does not always carry out his judgements immediately. . . This is what the psalmist observes in **Psalms 73**. The sins of some men go ahead of them, whilst the sins of others drag behind.
- Secondly, Zophar is wrong in suggesting that the kind of blessing/judgement people can expect is always a material one. . .

- Thirdly, this view is also wrong as a view of Christian discipleship, for it suggests that following Christ need not involve suffering.

David Clines: Whereas for Eliphaz Job's suffering is brought about by some relatively trifling sin and is therefore bound to be soon relieved (**4:5–6**), and for Bildad also Job's essential righteousness is confirmed by the fact that he, unlike his children, has not been cut off from life (**8:4–6**), for Zophar Job's suffering is nothing but deserved suffering. Both Eliphaz and Bildad set the suffering of their friend in a particular context: Eliphaz in the context of Job's evidently near-blameless life, Bildad in the context of the fate of Job's children. From either perspective, Job's suffering is qualified and thus—to the satisfaction of the first two friends—suitably mollified. . .

Zophar strikes the readers as the least sympathetic of the friends; but it is just because he so determinedly refuses to take other factors into account that he actually stands closest to Job. For Job also rejects out of hand any argument that does not address itself directly to his present situation; and though he cannot for a moment assent to Zophar's analysis, he must agree with him that sin is the principal—or rather, the only—issue. . .

Yet even Zophar, for all his shortsightedness, is an orthodox theologian with something of value to teach. Picture his position thus: Whatever is (suffering, for example), is; and whatever is past (sin, for example) is past. There is no point in crying over spilled milk—nor even over spilled blood. It is from the present moment onward that a life of godliness is to be lived, the mind directed in concentrated intention toward God, the hands spread out in an attitude of prayer, and sin henceforth banished from the life (**vv 13–14**). And simplistic though his theology of reward is, it is a striking affirmation of the truths that “*God rewards those who seek him*” (Heb 11:6), and that “*the prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (**James 5:16**).

John Hartley: Zophar strives to impress Job with the awesomeness of God's wisdom. God's ways are too profound for a mere human being to understand fully. The Creator of the vast universe is aware of all that happens on earth and judges all wrongdoing. Therefore, Job is wrong in thinking that there are wicked who prosper. In fact, in Job's case God is showing mercy by not punishing him even more. It is clear that Zophar has taken the final step in the logic of the doctrine of retribution, concluding that Job is suffering for some hidden sin. For him it means that Job's suffering is justly deserved. Therefore, Job's complaint against God is untenable. Assuredly it is useless for Job to plead that God overlook any wrongs he might have done, for that is God's way with all human beings. There remains only one way for Job to escape his plight—the way of repentance. When he devotes himself fully to God, he will find the peaceful serenity for which his soul longs. But if Job remains obstinate, he will experience the futile end that all the wicked experience.

Roy Zuck: Like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar recommended that Job repent (**vv. 13-14**) and receive restoration. God would then remove his shame (cf. **10:15**) and give him security and confidence. Job would be able to forget his trouble and he would have joy

(11:17; cf. 9:25; 10:20), security, hope, and rest (11:18). Fear would be gone and people would again look to him for leadership. If Job continued in his wickedness, however, he would die (*his eyes would fail*), he would be trapped by his sin (cf. 18:8-10), and his hope would die with him.

These first speeches by Job's compatriots offered no comfort. Though their generalities about God's goodness, justice, and wisdom were true, their cruel charge that Job repent of some hidden sin **missed the mark**. They failed to see that God sometimes has other reasons for human suffering.

E.S.P. Heavenor: Zophar is the **narrow dogmatist** par excellence. We find in him two flaws characteristic of his type. In the first place he is **too confident** in his religious standpoint. We find no traces of a humble "I do not know". He is right in maintaining that he is in touch with truth (see, e.g., 11:7-11, which speaks of the peerless, transcendent wisdom of God). He is wrong in thinking that he has all the truth. He understands not a whit more than Job about the reason for Job's sufferings. Second, he is lacking in **humility**. He is swift to call Job to go down on his knees at the recollection of the limitations of human knowledge. Yet, as he talks down to Job, he forgets that the mind scrutinizing his sufferings is limited too. Unknown to himself, his deductions from Job's misery have a far greater stamp of the wild ass's colt (11:12) on them than the most agonized cries of the sufferer.

Meredith Kline: If God wills to bring a man into judgment, the man cannot escape. Zophar thus endorses the conclusion Job had earlier drawn from the absolute wisdom of God, namely, that resistance to Him is futile (cf. 9:12; 10:7b). But while Job had also appealed to the divine omniscience for vindication of his innocence (10:7a), Zophar does so to convict Job of guilt: *He seeth wickedness also* (v. 11b). Having openly condemned Job, and being ignorant himself of any direct evidence to substantiate his charge, Zophar finds it convenient to supplement his own ignorance with the omniscience of the Almighty. He would have made better use of his excellent doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God, however, if he had humbly recognized the limitations of his own knowledge of divine providence and had not presumed to understand Job's sufferings to perfection. This truth of God's unsearchable wisdom, though sadly mishandled by Zophar, is the doctrine that should have quieted Job's spirit and silenced his complaints. By reckoning more seriously with his, Job and his friends alike would have recognized that his sufferings were compatible with exemplary piety on one side and divine favor on the other.

TEXT: Job 12:1 – 13:17

TITLE: *JOB COMPLAINS AGAINST HIS FRIENDS*

BIG IDEA:

WORTHLESS COUNSEL FAILS TO PLUMB THE DEPTHS OF THE WISDOM BEHIND GOD'S STRANGE WORKS

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: The importance of this speech of Job, standing at the threshold between the first and second cycles, is marked by its length. It is the longest of all his speeches so far, and only his closing speech in **chaps. 29–31** will be longer. At this position, the speech serves both as a first reply to the friends collectively and as the precipitating cause of the ensuing cycle of speeches. There are no compelling reasons for connecting the speech with the second cycle (as do most scholars) rather than with the first, and it is preferable to regard it (and similarly **chap. 21**) as transitional.

John Hartley: Job's speech consists of two parts distinguished by the **party addressed**. In the first part Job defends his skill in wisdom as equal to his friends' (**12:1–13:17**). In the second part he petitions God to try his case before the divine tribunal (**13:18–14:22**).

Warren Wiersbe: Zophar's speech was a brief one, but Job took a long time to answer each of Zophar's accusations. Job began with Zophar's second accusation that Job had no knowledge of God (**Job 11:5-12**). Job affirmed that he had wisdom and understanding just as they did (**Job 12**). Then he replied to Zophar's first accusation that Job was a guilty sinner (**11:1-4**). Job once again affirmed his integrity (**Job 13**). Job then closed his speech by challenging Zophar's third point, that there was still hope (**11:13-20**). In **Job 14**, Job admits that his hope is almost gone.

Edward Gibson: Zophar's speech has, perhaps not unnaturally, **embittered** Job more than anything that has yet been said, for not only has his guilt been assumed, as by the other speakers, but he has actually been told that he has come off better than he deserved. Hence in this next speech of his he turns upon his friends and pours scorn and sarcasm upon them. Their vaunted wisdom, of which they are so proud, is nothing more than the brute beasts could teach them. He himself knows everything that they have tried to tell him. They are '*forgers of lies*,' and '*physicians of no value*,' and had better hold their peace altogether. Then turning away from them, he determines at all costs to make his appeal to God and plead his cause before Him, either as defendant or plaintiff, he cares not which; and so, as if rehearsing his intended speech, he pleads his cause, once more expostulating with God for His treatment of him, complaining of the hopelessness of his condition, and contrasting his hapless fate with that of the trees of the forest. These, even when cut down, have something like a future life in store for them, for the young shoots spring up from their stock. If only there were anything like

this for him, he could wait and be patient. But, as it is, he can have no hope, and thus falls back into despair.

(12:1) PROLOGUE

“Then Job responded,”

I. (12:2-6) COMPLAINT OF JOB IS LACED WITH SARCASM – YOU ARE DISRESPECTING MY SUFFERING

Derek Kidner: In bitter sarcasm, Job suggests that his counsellors are too conceited. Their view of themselves is too inflated. . . In no way does he feel himself inferior to them for in his pain he has come to learn something that his friends do not know. He knows that it is possible in God’s way of things for a righteous man to suffer. It is not always true that the wicked are judged immediately (12:4-6). Even the animals and birds know it (12:7-9). This is a valuable lesson to learn; indeed it is the chief lesson of the book of Job. Learn it now and learn it well, the book seems to be saying to us, and you will spare yourself further pain.

A. (:2-3) Sarcasm Regarding Their Attitude of Superiority

*“Truly then you are the people,
And with you wisdom will die!
3 But I have intelligence as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
And who does not know such things as these?”*

David Guzik: It is easy to hear the sarcastic and bitter tone of voice in Job. That tone was appropriately taken, because Job’s friends really had acted as if they were the people and if they had all wisdom.

David Clines: In speaking again after all his friends have addressed him, Job is directing himself to them all collectively, not to Zophar in particular. This speech begins with his comment on their collective wisdom. They have put themselves forward as purveyors of wisdom, but they have had nothing to teach Job.

John Hartley: Job reproaches the friends for their pride and insensitivity. Using plural forms, he addresses all of them. He is so upset with the friends that he resorts to scathing sarcasm. . . Job judges the friends’ superior attitude of belonging to the gentry to say that they think themselves to be the only people with whom wisdom resides, so much so that when they die the world’s storehouse of wisdom will be depleted. . .

Sensing that Zophar has implied that he is lacking in wisdom, Job counters with the assertion that he is in no way inferior to (*nāpāl*) them. Indeed, what they speak is such common knowledge that their wisdom fails to offer him any insight into his sufferings.

Tremper Longman: After insulting them, he himself claims equal if not superior wisdom. We must remember that the disputations are really about who has wisdom. Wisdom is what is needed to diagnose Job's problem and to determine the remedy. The three friends claim it and belittle Job's wisdom, and vice versa. Here Job states that he has wisdom, not they.

B. (:4) Sarcasm Regarding His Humiliation as a Laughingstock

"I am a joke to my friends.

The one who called on God, and He answered him;

The just and blameless man is a joke."

John Hartley: Job grieves over the depth of his humiliation. He identifies himself as one who continually called on God, a righteous [*ṣaddīq*] and blameless [*tāmīm*] man. He echoes here the description of his character found in **1:1**, that he was blameless (*tām*) and upright (*yāšār*). But now he who was accorded the highest honor has become a laughingstock. The use of the imperfect *I have become* (*'ehyeh*) underscores the change that has taken place in Job's situation. Even his closest friends now mock him. No one likes to be laughed at, but in ancient times to become an object of public scorn was the worst possible disgrace.

Francis Andersen: vv. 4-6 -- It is not clear how these lines serve as a transition from his opening rebuke to the main poem in **verses 7-25**. The point seems to be this. The friends' wisdom has not explained the contradiction between Job's condition (a just and blameless man, the victim of ridicule) and that of robbers who are at peace. The contrast is all the more extreme because Job has called upon God, whereas the robbers *bring their god in their hand*.

C. (:5-6) Sarcasm Regarding the Prosperity and Security of the Wicked

"He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt,

As prepared for those whose feet slip.

The tents of the destroyers prosper,

And those who provoke God are secure,

Whom God brings into their power."

John Hartley: With a proverb Job reprimands the friends for their contemptuous attitude toward his misfortune. Their ridicule is the direct opposite of the compassion he expects from them. This proverb says that when a man at ease, i.e., safe from danger and rich in possessions, has contempt, not compassion, for anyone overcome by disaster, his ridicule strikes a mighty blow against him whose feet are slipping.

David Clines: What it means to be a **laughingstock** is now developed. The innocent Job is the butt of those secure in their piety, like the Zophar who has just now been busy picturing a future for the "converted" Job, a future when he will be secure, confident, and fearless (**11:15-19**; cf. also **8:13-15**). For their security is grounded upon their convictions of exact retribution: they cannot be harmed, for they are righteous. And they maintain their security by instantly designating any sufferer an evildoer; if anyone

suffers injury, that person deserves moral condemnation as well (“add insult to injury” is their principle); and if anyone is staggering beneath misfortune, that person is an apt target for censure (“strike him down” with social disapproval, for his misfortune has already marked him out as impious).

David Guzik: Now, it seemed to Job that his life and prior understanding was upside-down. Before, everything seemed to make sense – the righteous seemed to be blessed and the wicked seemed to be afflicted. Now, it is all different.

John Hartley: The third line [*“Whom God brings into their power”*] is difficult to interpret.

- It could be saying that these marauders carry God in their hands, for ancient travelers had pocket-size idols that they would take along with them on a journey. In that case this is a reference to the **idolatry** of the marauders.
- A second view, represented by Delitzsch, suggests that the gods in their hands are their **swords**. Since these bandits are ruthlessly successful, their swords have become their gods.
- A third alternative understands the line as saying that these marauders believe themselves to be as powerful as God. Therefore, they neither fear God nor see any need for him.

David Thompson: Job says it is easy for you guys to talk about how calamity is always a judgment of God while you sit on the sidelines free from calamity. It was easy for them to look down their noses and piously discuss how ones’ feet are slipping away into judgment from God, when life is sailing for you. They had their health and they had their wealth so it was easy for them to give their advice.

II. (12:7-12) COMPLAINT OF JOB MOCKS THEIR SIMPLICITY -- YOU ARE SPOUTING COMMON KNOWLEDGE AS BRILLIANT INSIGHT

David Clines: Developing **Gordis**’s argument, I would suggest that these verses are not Job’s address to the friends but an ironic statement by him of what he imagines they have been saying to him, or might well say to him. . . The thrust of the verses would then be that the friends have a simplistic view of divine activity, conceiving God’s way of dealing with the world as obvious and well-known throughout creation (vv 7–9), and as a matter of traditional lore (v 12) that admits no novel adjustments to suit the whim of a theological parvenu like Job.

Elmer Smick: Now Job appeals to the experience of humanity and all creation to support his view that it makes no difference whether people are good or bad. God does not use morality as the basis for granting freedom from affliction. The issue over the problem of theodicy is joined, an issue every believer must eventually wrestle with. Job’s counselors are so superficial that they have not yet struggled with this difficult problem. Their thoughts on the subject are simplistic. Job considers their words bland

and superficial, certainly not a worthy part of the wisdom of elders (vv.11–12). He has already accused them of serving tasteless food (thoughts; 6:6–7).

Tremper Longman: Job has asserted that the world works the opposite of the way the three friends imagine and argue. The wicked are not punished, and the innocent are not rewarded. Quite the contrary. They have argued in their wisdom for their view, and Job is countering with his wisdom, which perceives the world differently. As I have stated many times before, Job shares the friends' **retribution theology**; that is, the world should work the way they describe, but it does not. That it does not indicates that the world is unfair.

In this debate, the three friends and Job support their arguments by calling on **witnesses**. In this section of his speech, Job appeals to the animal and natural world, on the one hand, and the aged, on the other hand, in a way that implies that they agree with his view of the universe.

A. (:7-8) Nature Testifies to Your Simplistic Counsel

*“But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you;
And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you.
8 Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you;
And let the fish of the sea declare to you.”*

John Hartley: The strong adversative conjunction *But* (ʿûlām) indicates that Job is taking up a new subject. Here he exalts God as the creator of all and affirms that wisdom may be found by listening to the creatures God has created.

B. (:9-10) Nobody Denies God's Sovereign Control

*“Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?”*

David Clines: Job reproaches his friends by insinuating that they treat him as a mental defective or a moral delinquent, needing the most elementary lessons from the world of nature.

John Hartley: God sustains human life and directs human destiny. There is nothing that takes place on earth outside of his governance. All is incorporated into his purpose. With these words Job is questioning, without denying God's sovereignty, the proposition that God immediately carries out retribution on all evildoers.

C. (:11) Naïve Counsel Fails the Discernment Test

*“Does not the ear test words,
As the palate tastes its food?”*

John Hartley: Just as the palate tastes food and decides whether it is savory or foul, so the ear tests words to ascertain what is reasonable or irrational, pleasing or discordant, true or false. The ear with its discriminating ability enables one to discern the credibility of words.

D. (:12) Novices in Life's Experiences Have No Insight to Share

*"Wisdom is with aged men,
With long life is understanding."*

David Clines: Some regard v 12 as the beginning of the hymn to the wisdom and might of God (vv 12–25), and in attributing v 12 to the persona of Job see it as the backdrop of v 13 (cf. GNB "*Old men have wisdom, but God has wisdom and power*"). This is not an impossible view, but it is not very probable to have Job conceding that the aged have wisdom, even if he is quick to assert that it is little by comparison with God's. It is better to see v 13 as Job's response in *propria persona* to the friends' position represented in v 12.

Thomas Constable: Verse 12 may also be **irony**; this was not what Job believed. On the other hand, Job may have been quoting his friends or asking a rhetorical question: "*Is wisdom with aged men ...?*" (NIV, TNIV, NRSV, NET2). Job then proceeded to show that God is the only truly wise Person (12:13)—in refutation of Bildad (8:8). Job mentioned several outrageous acts of God that demonstrate His mysterious wisdom (cf. chs. 38—41). He also pointed out God's great power as seen in the processes of nature and the affairs of nations (12:14-21).

**III. (12:13-25) COMPLAINT OF JOB EXPOSES THE SHALLOWNESS OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM –
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND GOD'S PURPOSES BEHIND THE
DEPLOYMENT OF HIS WISDOM AND POWER**

John Hartley: These lines laud God as the ultimate source of everything, light and darkness, good and evil, peace and calamity. God is superior to all in wisdom and understanding. As Lord of the universe, he governs the world wisely and mightily. All earthly potentates are subject to him. He gives them power and takes it away according to his pleasure. The very one he exalts he may bring down at his will. God is in control even of the darkness, bringing the hidden things to light. Nothing lies outside his power or beyond his wisdom. . .

In these verses Job focuses on God's devastating power that appears to be used capriciously to curtail the activity of earth's greatest potentates. God overwhelms them with devastating force, seemingly without reason. Thus Job implies that the reason for his troubles resides with God, not with himself.

Elmer Smick: He is saying that God's actions are indeed mysterious and strange. Job cannot figure them out, but he knows as much about them as the others. In other words,

Job believes the mystery is profound; and he is amazed that the “sages” would be so shallow (v.12). Job sees God so wise and powerful that he cannot be put in a box. He has sovereign freedom. Job illustrates this by drawing a word picture of the mystery of God’s acts in the history of humanity. God humbles great men and nations, showing himself to be the only truly sovereign being (vv.16–25). However, it is also true, as mentioned above, that Job emphasizes the negative use God makes of his wisdom and power. After all, he feels that God uses them against him with the same destructive consequences.

Derek Kidner: The hymn is inadequate as a full description of God’s purposes in this world. Even the pain is being woven into the tapestry of our life for our good and betterment (cf. **Romans 8:28**). This is something Job has yet to see.

A. (:13) True Wisdom and Power Belong to God

*“With Him are wisdom and might;
To Him belong counsel and understanding.”*

John Hartley: All aspects of wisdom—connoted by the four terms wisdom (*hokmā*), might (*ḡebūrā*), counsel (*‘ēṣā*), and understanding (*tebūnā*)—reside in God (cf. **Isa. 11: 2**). That is, God possesses both the wisdom to plan the best course of action and the might or power to carry out that course. In ancient Near Eastern myths the qualities of wisdom and power often resided in different gods. The strongest gods, not being the wisest, did things that often had terrible consequences. And since the wisest god was not the strongest, he could be rendered inept before the ferocity of the mighty gods and would have to resort to magic to counter their ill-conceived designs. But in the OT wisdom and strength are one in the true God. The following hymnic lines testify primarily to God’s power over all earthly leaders and nations with the inference that all of his mighty deeds are accomplished in wisdom and that no earthly ruler or nation is strong enough or wise enough to resist his purpose.

Francis Andersen: The long description of the activities of God given in **verses 14–25** suggests that there is **no discrimination between good and evil**. While most of the examples illustrate God’s demolition of the achievements of men, the key thought seems to be that ‘*the deceived and the deceiver are his*’, equally (**16b**). In case this might suggest that God is whimsical, or a blind force, Job insists that God’s might is coupled with wisdom, counsel and understanding. There is an **intelligent purpose**. The acts are deliberate, even if man can barely see their meaning or moral justification.

B. (:14-15) Thwarting God’s Purposes Is Impossible – His Wisdom and Power Accomplish His Ends

*“Behold, He tears down, and it cannot be rebuilt;
He imprisons a man, and there can be no release.
15 Behold, He restrains the waters, and they dry up;
And He sends them out, and they inundate the earth.”*

David Clines: What gives this selection its potency is that all the scenes show God acting destructively, negatively or in the cause of chaos.

C. (:16-22) Turning Powerful People Upside Down is Consistent with God's Wisdom and Power

1. (:16) God Acts Indiscriminately Against All People

*"With Him are strength and sound wisdom,
The misled and the misleader belong to Him."*

2. (:17) God Frustrates Counselors and Judges

*"He makes counselors walk barefoot,
And makes fools of judges."*

Tremper Longman: The next verse continues the thought when it says that God undermines the work of various leaders of the community whose purpose is to bring order and justice and health to the community. These include **counselors** who are plundered (perhaps of their good advice) as well as **judges** who are deluded. The latter need clear thinking to adjudicate matters of justice, but Job believes God confuses them so they cannot think clearly.

3. (:18) God Undermines the Majesty of Kings

*"He loosens the bond of kings,
And binds their loins with a girdle."*

Francis Andersen: The emphasis is that all these great ones are puny figures in the fingers of God.

Tremper Longman: Perhaps this is an ancient saying with which we have lost touch, but it may mean that God can dishevel a king outwardly with the implied idea that he can do so mentally as well. That would fit in with the idea in this section that God damages the perceptions of counselors, judges, and so on.

4. (:19) God Humbles the Priests and the Secure Ones

*"He makes priests walk barefoot,
And overthrows the secure ones."*

5. (:20) God Silences the Trusted Ones and the Elders

*"He deprives the trusted ones of speech,
And takes away the discernment of the elders."*

Tremper Longman: God's **ravishing of leaders** continues in the next two verses. He removes speech from **trusted people**, who would be able to give good advice. The lay leaders, the **elders**, are also injured in terms of their ability to provide help in making decisions (their discernment). The **princes** and the **strong** are also hurt by God's power and wisdom. The former suffer a similar fate as kings who had their sashes loosened, though a different phrase is used.

6. (:21) God Vitiates the Nobles and the Strong

*“He pours contempt on nobles,
And loosens the belt of the strong.”*

7. (:22) God Brings Enlightenment and Light Out of Darkness

*“He reveals mysteries from the darkness,
And brings the deep darkness into light.”*

D. (:23-25) Transforming Order into Chaos and Destruction is Consistent with God’s Wisdom and Power

*“He makes the nations great, then destroys them;
He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.
24 He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth’s people,
And makes them wander in a pathless waste.
25 They grope in darkness with no light,
And He makes them stagger like a drunken man.”*

John Hartley: God rules not only over mighty leaders but also over the great nations. They rise and fall at his command. He allows a people to become great and spread out; i.e., a nation increases its territory through diplomatic intrigue and conquest. But in time God sees to it that that nation falls in defeat and its people are dispersed. . .

The picture of God’s unchallengeable power is complete. He overthrows every hostile force and reigns supreme. A wise ruler, he exposes all the sinful ways and executes appropriate punishment against human rebellion by turning human-ordered society into chaos. Chaotic upheaval is the ultimate judgment against a community for its corporate sins.

David Clines: vs. 23 -- Yet another form in which the chaos-creating power of God can be portrayed is here presented. In v 14 there were two destructive acts of God (he destroys, he imprisons) which cannot be reversed. In v 15 there were two mutually contradictory acts of God and their consequences. In vv 17–21 there was a simple succession of ten verbs describing his activity toward society’s leaders (eight or nine groups being specified). Here there are two sets of mutually contradictory acts, chiastically arranged, in reference to the same object, nations generally. He makes them great (or, numerous) but (then, or, equally) wipes them out of existence; he scatters them abroad, but (then, or, equally) guides them to a homeland.

Tremper Longman: In sum, Job argues that God has great wisdom and strength. However, he uses that to **confuse**, not to illuminate. He uses it to **destroy**, not to build up.

David Guzik: We sense that Job actually described himself, as this prominent man without understanding, a man wandering in a pathless wilderness, a man groping in the dark without light, and who staggered like a drunken man.

Peter Wallace: God is wise and powerful. He does what is right – but he is also the one who decides what is right! If you try to judge God by any human standard, you will speak wrongly about God. Conventional wisdom theology emphasized that those who do good are rewarded – and those who do evil are punished. But Job now suspects that conventional wisdom theology is on the wrong track. In fact, sometimes God’s wisdom runs directly contrary to “conventional wisdom.” The wisdom of the ages has nothing to say to a righteous man who has been made a laughingstock by God. Sometimes God’s will and desire is the opposite of what you would expect.

IV. (13:1-17) COMPLAINT OF JOB SILENCES HIS CRITICS AS HE PIVOTS TO MAKE HIS CASE TO GOD – YOU HAVE PROVED TO BE WORTHLESS COUNSELORS

Adam Clarke:

- Job defends himself against the accusations of his friends, and accuses them of endeavoring to pervert truth, **1-8**.
- Threatens them with God's judgments, **9-12**.
- Begs some respite, and expresses strong confidence in God, **13-19**.
- He pleads with God, and deplors his severe trials and sufferings, **20-28**.

A. (:1-12) Failure of the Counselors

Warren Wiersbe: They had such a rigid and narrow view of God, and such a prejudiced view of Job, that their whole “case” was a fabrication of lies. What would they do when God turned the tables and examined them? (See **Rom. 14:1-13**.) “*Your maxims are proverbs of ashes; your defenses are defenses of clay*” (**Job 13:12**, NIV). What the three friends thought were profound statements of truth were only warmed-over ashes from ancient fires, clay pots that would fall apart. A good counselor needs much more than a good memory. He or she also needs wisdom to know how to apply the truth to the needs of people today.

Edward Gibson: All this absolute power of God Job knows quite as well as his friends (**1, 2**), and he longs to reason it all out with God (**3**). His friends are utterly incapable of helping him, and have shown themselves wanting in straightforwardness (**4**), and if they value their reputation, they will be wise to hold their tongues altogether (**5**). Let them attend to his rebuke for the way in which they have lied on behalf of God (**6-8**), Who will certainly reject their advocacy and punish them (**9-11**). Why, even their best utterances are ‘*proverbs of ashes*,’ and their arguments crumble to pieces (**12**).

1. (:1-5) Decision to Turn Away from Worthless Counselors and Argue to God
 - a. (:1) No Blinders on My Discernment
“Behold, my eye has seen all this,
My ear has heard and understood it.”

b. (:2) No Deficiency in My Knowledge

*“What you know I also know.
I am not inferior to you.”*

c. (:3) No Limit on My Court of Appeal

*“But I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to argue with God.”*

David Clines: But in the end, what really matters to Job is not the truth in general about the divine character but the particular confrontation with God in which he, Job, is involved. Job’s uncovering of the divine cruelty has not been an end in itself, as if it were the exposé of an investigative theological journalist. It was undertaken primarily to demonstrate that his plight could not be ameliorated by recourse to hackneyed formulae of retribution, that the wisdom of the ages had nothing to offer a righteous man who had been made a laughingstock by God (**12:4**).

Francis Andersen: When Job says to his friends (the pronouns are plural), *What you know, I also know*, he is not only claiming to be their intellectual equal. He is also conceding that they have much common theological ground. But this is not enough for Job. He has still to find out how these truths apply to himself. This requires direct dealing with God. While *argue my case* has primary reference to the settlement of a legal dispute, the use of the same root in **Isaiah 1:18** (where ‘*let us reason together*’ is God’s offer) includes the desire, not to win the suit, but to reconcile the offended party by **sorting out the misunderstanding**. Job is willing to confess to any sins that may be proved against him (**13:23**), but so far neither his memory nor his friends have done this. His own vindication and God’s will go hand in hand, but what he needs more is **understanding of the ways of God** through rational discussion. So far the friends have failed to supply the needed explanation (**4–12**). It must come from God.

d. (:4) No Value in Your Counsel

*“But you smear with lies;
You are all worthless physicians.”*

John Hartley: Before taking up his case with God, Job makes blatant charges against his comforters. He calls them *whitewashers of lies*, i.e., they smear (Heb. *tāpal*) the difficulties of explaining his plight with lies in order to make the tradition appear flawless. Their discourses have glossed over the hard facts of his innocent suffering, for they feel compelled to defend their cherished doctrines at his expense (cf. **Ps. 119:69**, which uses the same expression). Their pious mortar (cf. Heb. *tāpēl*) has been composed of lies. In defense of God they condemn Job. Their approach, unfortunately, is an ingrained human tendency. When faced with a perplexing problem, one often tries to get around it or to cover it over with some type of ideological explanation instead of honestly admitting the difficulties involved.

Because of their inability to face the hard facts, the friends have proved to be *worthless physicians* (*rōpe ’īm*). These charlatans are pictured as vainly daubing a sore with a

useless salve. They merely go through the ritual in an effort to comfort the patient. At best they arouse false hope. The harsh tone of these accusations shows that the rift between Job and his friends is widening into an irreparable breach.

e. (:5) No Benefit to Your Words

*“O that you would be completely silent,
And that it would become your wisdom!”*

Tremper Longman: like a doctor who makes a misdiagnosis, they are worthless. They would do better to shut up. Here Job in essence calls the friends fools, and according to **Prov. 17:28**, the best recourse for fools is to keep their mouths shut, because they reveal their folly when they speak: *“Even a dupe who keeps silent seems wise; those who keep their lips shut are smart.”*

2. (:6-9) Defending God with Partiality and Deceit Puts You in Jeopardy

*“Please hear my argument,
And listen to the contentions of my lips.
7 Will you speak what is unjust for God,
And speak what is deceitful for Him?
8 Will you show partiality for Him?
Will you contend for God?
9 Will it be well when He examines you?
Or will you deceive Him as one deceives a man?”*

John MacArthur: vs. 7 – He accused them of using lies and fallacies to vindicate God when they asserted that Job was a sinner because he was a sufferer.

3. (:10-12) Divine Accountability Will Redress Your Worthless Counsel

*“He will surely reprove you,
If you secretly show partiality.
11 Will not His majesty terrify you,
And the dread of Him fall on you?
12 Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes,
Your defenses are defenses of clay.”*

John Hartley: vs. 12 -- Job ends his complaint against the friends by renouncing their instruction. He states sarcastically that their arguments are buttressed by proverbs of ashes and their answers are answers of clay. Before the truth their wisdom will crumble like a ceramic pot.

Elmer Smick: Job’s argument in vv.6–12 has the following interesting twist. How dare his friends argue God’s case deceitfully and use lies to flatter God? Job warns them about lying even while they utter beautiful words in defense of God. If they are going to plead God’s case, they had better do it honestly. God will judge them for their deceit even if they use it in his behalf (vv.8–9).

B. (:13-17) Faith of Job in Turning to God

Warren Wiersbe: This is one of the greatest declarations of faith found anywhere in Scripture, but it must be understood in the context. Job is saying, “I will take my case directly to God and prove my integrity. I know I am taking my life in my hands in approaching God, because He is able to slay me. But if He doesn’t slay me, it is proof that I am not the hypocrite you say I am.”

1. (:13) Faith Shuts Out Worthless Chatter

*“Be silent before me so that I may speak;
Then let come on me what may.”*

2. (:14) Faith Assumes Risks

*“Why should I take my flesh in my teeth,
And put my life in my hands?”*

John MacArthur: A proverb meaning “Why should I anxiously desire to save my life?” Like an animal who holds its prey in its mouth to preserve it or a man who holds in his hand what he wants to secure, Job could try to preserve his life, but that was not his motive.

3. (:15) Faith Holds on to Hope

*“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.”*

4. (:16) Faith Anticipate Vindication

*“This also will be my salvation,
For a godless man may not come before His presence.”*

John Hartley: Job knows that only if he can dispute his case before God will he find salvation or deliverance (*yešû ‘ā*) from suffering, ignominy, and God’s hostility. Since Job knows that there is no salvation outside God, he must win his deliverance from God. Thus he abandons the friends’ counsel to find restoration to prosperity through confession of sins. Job reasons that a godless man (*hānēp*) would never be permitted to come before God. Consequently, if God should give him an audience, that in itself would be proof of his innocence.

George Barton: In spite of all of Job's sorrow and suffering and in spite of all the harsh things which in some moods he said about God, his faith in the unswerving justice of God remains. Even conduct which the orthodoxy of the day regarded as blasphemous would contribute to his salvation, he believed, because God is the God of truth and sincerity. This sublime confidence in the unswerving fairness of God is one of the fine touches of the poem.

5. (:17) Faith Demands a Hearing

*“Listen carefully to my speech,
And let my declaration fill your ears.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) If there is wisdom in the multitude of counselors, why couldn't Job derive any benefit from these friends?
- 2) Why is it often a mistake to try to explain God's purposes behind His dealings in a specific situation?
- 3) How can one express confusion and bitterness while still holding on to faith and hope?
- 4) What was Job's expectation of the outcome of making his case to God?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Dean Bradley: The whole world, Job feels, is against him, and he is left forlorn and solitary, unpitied in his misery, unguided in his perplexity. And he may well feel so. All the religious thought of his day, all the traditions of the past, all the wisdom of the patriarchal Church, if I may use, as I surely may, the expression, is on one side. He, that solitary sufferer and doubter, is on the other. And this is not all, or the worst. His own habits of thought, his own training, are arrayed against him. He had been nursed, it is abundantly clear, in the same creed as those who feel forced to play the part of his spiritual advisers. The new and terrible experience of this crushing affliction, of this appalling visitation, falling upon one who had passed his life in the devout service of God, strikes at the very foundation of the faith on which that life, so peaceful, so pious, and so blessed, as it has been put before us in the prologue to the tragedy, has been based and built up. All seems against him; his friends, his God, his pains and anguish, his own tumultuous thoughts; all but one voice within, which will not be silenced or coerced. How easy for him, had he been reared in a heathen creed, to say, "My past life must have been a delusion; my conscience has borne me false witness. I did justice, I loved mercy, I walked humbly with my God. But I must in some way, I know not how, have offended a capricious and arbitrary, but an all-powerful and remorseless Being. I will allow with you that that life was all vitiated by some act of omission or of commission of which I know nothing. Him therefore who has sent His furies to plague me, I will now try to propitiate." But no! Job will not come before his God, a God of righteousness, holiness, and truth, with a lie on his lips. And so he now stands stubbornly at bay, and in this and the following two chapters he bursts forth afresh with a strain of scorn and upbraiding that dies away into despair, as he turns from his human

tormentors, once his friends, to the God who seems, like them, to have become his foe, but to whom he clings with an indomitable tenacity. (*The Biblical Illustrator*)

John Gill: In this and the two following chapter Job makes answer to Zophar's discourse in the former; who having represented him as an ignorant man, he resents it, and begins his defense with a biting sarcasm on him and his friends, as being self-conceited, and having an high opinion of their own wisdom, as if none had any but themselves, **Job 12:1**; and puts in his claim for a share with them, as being not at all inferior to them, **Job 12:3**; and then refutes their notions, that it always goes well with good men, and ill with bad men; whereas the reverse is the truth, **Job 12:4**; and which they might learn from the brute creatures; or he sends them to them, to observe to them, that the best things they had knowledge of concerning God and his providence, and of his wisdom therein, were common notions that everyone had, and might be learned from beasts, birds, and fishes; particularly, that all things in the whole universe are made by God, and sustained by him, and are under his direction, and at his disposal, **Job 12:7**; and such things might as easily be searched, examined, and judged of, as sounds are tried by the ear, and food by the mouth, **Job 12:11**; and seeing it is usual among men, at least it may be expected that men in years should have a considerable share of wisdom and knowledge, it might be strongly inferred from thence, without any difficulty, that the most perfect and consummate wisdom was in God, **Job 12:12**; whence he passes on to discourse most admirably and excellently of the wisdom and power of God in the dispensations of his providence, in a variety of instances; which shows his knowledge of his perfections, ways, and works, was not inferior to that of his friends, **Job 12:14**. . .

Job begins this **chapter 13** by observing the extensiveness of his knowledge, as appeared from his preceding discourse, by which it was evident he was not less knowing than his friends, **Job 13:1**; and therefore would have nothing to do with them as judges in his cause, but would appeal to God, and debate the matter before him, and leave it to his decision, since he could expect no good from them, **Job 13:3**; and all the favour he entreats of them is, that they would for the future be no longer speakers, but hearers, **Job 13:5**; he expostulates with them about their wicked and deceitful way of pleading for God, and against him, **Job 13:7**; and in order to strike an awe upon them, suggests to them, that they were liable to the divine scrutiny; that God was not to be mocked by them, that he would surely reprove them for their respect of persons, and desires them to consider his dreadful majesty, and what frail creatures they were, **Job 13:9**; then he expresses his confidence in God, that he should be saved by him, notwithstanding the afflictive circumstances he was in, **Job 13:14**; and doubted not he should be able so to plead his cause, as that he should be justified, if God would but withdraw his hand, and take off his dread from him, **Job 13:18**.

G. Campbell Morgan: Job's final reply in the first cycle was to the whole argument rather than to Zophar's application thereof. From beginning to end it thrills with **sarcasm**, as he strenuously maintained his denial of personal guilt. The address falls into three sections, in the first of which he dealt with his friends by way of rebuke; in the second affirmed his personal determination; and in the last made a direct appeal to God. . .

His impeachment of them was that their judgment was warped by partiality for God, and he declared that God Himself would refuse to accept their defense.

He dismissed their arguments as being utterly worthless when he declared,

“Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes.”

The reference here to “*memorable sayings*” was almost certainly to the quotation of the sayings of the ancients which had occurred in the speech of Bildad, all of which had no application to him. The defenses of God which they had set up he described as “*defenses of clay*,” that is, they were easily broken down, and therefore worthless.

Cyril Barber: With chapters 12, 13 and 14 we come to a **transition**. In spite of his pain and the weight of his unanswered questions, Job has listened with great patience to the harsh judgments and occasional ranting of his three friends. Now with the final words from Zophar he chooses to respond to the vaunted knowledge and insensitive condemnation of his visitors. After this, they may decide to go their respective ways and leave him to his thoughts and solitary position on the garbage dump.

Job’s **vindication** of himself was three-fold:

- (1) He denied that his wisdom was inferior to his friends and that his status was inferior to theirs;
- (2) He denied the premise of their accusations because it was based upon the false logic that the innocent do not suffer, that suffering is caused by sin, and that in their eyes his sufferings indicate that he must be a great sinner; and,
- (3) He denied the false premise that outward prosperity and good health are infallible indicators of either godliness or wickedness.

TEXT: Job 13:18 – 14:22

TITLE: *WRESTLING WITH THE PAINFUL REALITIES OF LIFE –
FLIRTING WITH HOPELESSNESS*

BIG IDEA:

**THE TROUBLESOME CONDITION OF HUMAN MORTALITY
COMPOUNDED BY PERPLEXING DIVINE OPPOSITION LEAVES
MANKIND IN DESPAIR WITH NO RELIEF**

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Zuck: In a sudden shift of mood, Job turned from confidence that he could win his court case against God to a melancholy lament about life's futility and death's certainty.

Brian Borgman: **All the Days of My Struggle, I Wait for My Change (13:17-14:20)**

- A. Listen to my case (13:17-28)
- B. Life is hard then you die (14:1-6)
- C. A tree has more hope than me (7-12)
- D. Hide me in Sheol and then remember me (13-17)
- E. You destroy man's hope (18-22)

I. (13:18-28) CONFUSION OVER GOD'S UNEXPLAINED OPPOSITION

A. (:18-22) Transparency Should Yield Vindication – Not Confusion

1. (:18-19) Confidence in Ultimate Vindication

*“Behold now, I have prepared my case;
I know that I will be vindicated.
19 Who will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.”*

2. (:20-22) Concerns Complicating Open Communication with God

*“Only two things do not do to me,
Then I will not hide from Thy face:
21 Remove Thy hand from me,
And let not the dread of Thee terrify me.
22 Then call, and I will answer;
Or let me speak, then reply to me.”*

Meredith Kline: If only God will desist for a time from oppressing him and refrain from overwhelming him with his terrible majesty (13:21; cf. 9:34, 35), Job will appear before him either as defendant or as complainant (v. 22). If Job can successfully defend his integrity, it will be evident (according to his inadequate concept of human suffering) that God has been at fault in afflicting him so severely. Or, if Job is to succeed in convicting God of such wrong, he must first demonstrate his own integrity. Imagining

himself as confronting his tormentor in the coveted trial, the sufferer now demands an explanation of God's hostility (13:23, 24). But the judicial scene quickly fades, and the court oratory turns into the customary closing lamentation (13:25 ff.).

Tremper Longman: As preconditions to a meeting, Job insists that God back off from him ("move your palm far from me," v. 21a) and stop scaring him (v. 21b). . . Job says that he has hidden his face from God because God has been hard on him both physically and psychologically through his affliction and through his fright.

B. (:23-28) Tension over God's Strange Opposition

1. (:23) Make Known My Hidden Sins that are Causing Such Opposition

*"How many are my iniquities and sins?
Make known to me my rebellion and my sin."*

2. (:24-25) Mystery Questions Regarding God's Opposition and Man's Precarious Status

a. (:24) Regarding God's Opposition

*"Why dost Thou hide Thy face,
And consider me Thine enemy?"*

b. (:25) Regarding Man's Precarious Status

1) Illustration of God Chasing a Trembling Leaf

"Wilt Thou cause a driven leaf to tremble?"

2) Illustration of God Chasing the Dry Chaff

"Or wilt Thou pursue the dry chaff?"

Francis Andersen: Job never pretends that he is sinless. He freely admits being sinful in his youth (26). But he must know what particular sins warrant God's present hostility (24). By naming three kinds of sin—error, failure, rebellion—he lays himself wide open.

Elmer Smick: He sees himself as **helpless**, as swirling chaff or a wind-blown leaf. If God would only stop tormenting him and communicate, Job feels all will end well.

3. (:26-28) My Hardship Has Been Dictated by God

a. (:26) Divine Indictment

*"For Thou dost write bitter things against me,
And dost make me to inherit the iniquities of my youth."*

b. (:27) Debilitating Constraints

*"Thou dost put my feet in the stocks,
And dost watch all my paths;
Thou dost set a limit for the soles of my feet,"*

John Hartley: Job describes his present predicament as that of a prisoner closely confined and constantly watched. His feet are put in stocks, either a block of wood fastened about a prisoner's ankles to restrict his movements or bars that kept him from moving at all. The former situation is more likely, for the second line suggests that Job can move about while God keeps close watch on his paths. In this verse path means a way of escape, rather than one's life-style, as it often means in the Wisdom literature. The prisoner's feet were marked or banded in order that he might be easily tracked.

Tremper Longman: The last two verses describe the kind of pain that God is presently putting Job through. **Verse 27ab** uses the language of incarceration. Job is in stocks, and God restricts his movement. In **v. 27c** he speaks of God's cutting the soles of his feet. The significance of this is not clear, though it obviously describes his affliction and probably again that God restricts his movement.

c. (:28) Decaying Condition

*"While I am decaying like a rotten thing,
Like a garment that is moth-eaten."*

David Thompson: Not only does Job never curse God, he continues to acknowledge His sovereignty even though he himself is being crushed.

- 1) God is the One sovereignly writing the bitter script of Job's life. **13:26a**
- 2) God is the One who sovereignly makes Job pay for the sins of his youth. **13:26b**
- 3) God is the One who has sovereignly locked Job into these sufferings. **13:27a**
- 4) God is the One who sovereignly watches and controls everything in Job's life. **13:27b**

II. (14:1-6) CYNICISM OVER LIFE'S PERVASIVE TROUBLES

A. (:1-2) Life is Brief and Full of Trouble

1. (:1) Statement

*"Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil."*

John Hartley: The context favors the interpretation that *born of woman* means that the child is frail and subject to all human weaknesses.

2. (:2) Illustrations

a. Like a Flower

"Like a flower he comes forth and withers."

b. Like a Shadow

"He also flees like a shadow and does not remain."

Tremper Longman: Verse 2 illustrates his point about the brevity and hardship of life with the metaphors of a flower and a shadow. On the surface, a flower is a thing of beauty and pleasure. But flowers do not last very long. The fragile beauty of the flower is a fitting example of life. Life may begin with hope and energy, Job suggests, but as time progresses, life fades into something dry and ugly. The psalmist (103:15–16) and Isaiah (40:6–8) use the flower metaphor in a similar fashion. They, however, use it (along with withering grass) to contrast the fragility of human life with the permanence of God's word.

B. (:3-4) Life is Headed for Divine Judgment with No Human Remedy

1. (:3) Life is Headed for Divine Judgment

*“Thou also dost open Thine eyes on him,
And bring him into judgment with Thyself.”*

2. (:4) No Human Remedy

*“Who can make the clean out of the unclean? *
No one!”

John Hartley: These terms may relate to the birth process mentioned in v. 1. In giving birth a mother becomes ritually unclean. While it is not explicitly stated in any OT passage that this ritual impurity relates to inherited sin, a connection seems to be implied. That is, the ritual impurity attending birth foreshadows the certainty that the newborn child will become morally impure by transgressing the law. Not even God can prevent this from happening. He cannot make pure that which is impure by nature. Since this is true, Job is asking God why he holds a person accountable for every wrong he has done. Surely God cannot expect a human being to be flawless.

C. (:5-6) Life's Duration is Fixed and Life's Troubles Cry Out for Some Relief

1. (:5) Life's Duration is Fixed by God

*“Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with Thee,
And his limits Thou hast set so that he cannot pass.”*

David Guzik: Job continued to paint the picture of God fencing man in, restricting his movements. Under such an idea, it would be better if God would just look away so the afflicted one could rest.

2. (:6) Life's Troubles Cry Out for Some Relief

*“Turn Thy gaze from him that he may rest,
Until he fulfills his day like a hired man.”*

John Hartley: Feeling the constraints of a limited life span, Job petitions God to turn his gaze from humanity in general. If God would spare humanity his constant surveillance, everybody would be able to experience some joy during his days (cf. Job 7:19; 9:34; 13:21). Their joy would be like that experienced by a hired worker (cf. 7:1–2). Satisfied and tired from a hard day's work, he rests well at night. His pleasure, though it is

limited, is rich. Job feels that God should grant each person at least that much relief from his painful burden.

David Thompson: In this verse, Job pleads with God to give him just a brief moment of enjoyment. In this verse Job views himself as a hired man who is under the dominant control of God. He simply asks God for some relief.

If God would turn His gaze from a man, man could live out his life in some supposed form of tranquility. In the book of Job, the gaze of God is viewed as all of the negatives that God is sending to Job's life (7:19; 10:20). Job believed God sovereignly controlled every negative in his world and if God would just back off for a time, Job could enjoy a little life. Job is not asking to escape death; he is just asking for a little relief. Life for one right with God is not a tranquil pursuit of serenity in happy land.

Life for one right with God is war. It is a war coming directly from Satan.

III. (14:7-12) CONTRAST BETWEEN HOPE IN NATURE AND DESPAIR FOR MANKIND

Tremper Longman: **No hope for humans.** Job continues with the theme of **human mortality** (initiated in v. 5). He begins by contrasting **trees** and humans (vv. 7–10). Job points out that trees can be cut down to the stump, but, provided they receive water, they can flourish again. He pictures trees cut down and their roots rotting in the ground, but still they can live again. Not so for human beings. Once they die, they die. In vv. 11–12 Job cites another comparison, this time between humans and a **body of water**, either the sea or a river. Water, unlike trees, does not have the option of reviving to life once it has dried up. To make this comparison work, Job is not allowing for increased rainfall. **Wilson** correctly points to the fact that Job here uses “*river*” (*nāhār*) rather than “*wadi*” (*naḥal*), because the latter often dries up and then with rain or melting snow comes to life again. Human beings, once they sleep in death, will not be roused again. Death is the final sleep.

A. (:7-9) Illustration of the Revived Tree – Hope in Nature

*“For there is hope for a tree,
When it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
And its shoots will not fail.
8 Though its roots grow old in the ground,
And its stump dies in the dry soil,
9 At the scent of water it will flourish
And put forth sprigs like a plant.”*

B. (:10-12) Illustration of the Unrevived Finality of Human Death – Despair for Mankind

*“But man dies and lies prostrate.
Man expires, and where is he?”*

*11 As water evaporates from the sea,
And a river becomes parched and dried up,
12 So man lies down and does not rise.
Until the heavens be no more,
He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep.”*

IV. (14:13-17) CONCERNS ABOUT PRESENT PAIN AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Peter Wallace: Lots of scholars think that no one in the Old Testament believed in the **resurrection**. But plainly, by the time of the NT, faithful Jews all believed in the resurrection. I would suggest that **Job 14** shows us the beginnings of the OT doctrine of the resurrection. Job knows the traditional wisdom that sees death as the end – but he passionately longs for something more! Job realizes that if death is the end – and there is nothing more beyond death – then his whole case before God will fade into nothing. And so in **verses 13-17**, Job imagines the resurrection! It’s not clear yet that Job believes that this will actually happen – but he recognizes that something like the resurrection is needed!

David Guzik: Job longs for the grave and hopes for something beyond. . . Job looked for the change he hoped death to bring, that at least it would relieve him from his present agony.

John MacArthur: Job asked to die and remain in the grave until God’s anger was over, then be raised to life again when God called him back (**vv. 13-15**). If he were dead, God wouldn’t be watching every step, counting every sin (**v. 16**); it would all be hidden (**v. 17**). Here was the hope of resurrection, for those who trusted God. Job had hope that if he died, he would live again (**v. 14**).

A. (:13) Fatigue over Life’s Struggles Desires a Respite from Misery

*“Oh that Thou wouldst hide me in Sheol,
That Thou wouldst conceal me until Thy wrath returns to Thee,
That Thou wouldst set a limit for me and remember me!”*

Roy Zuck: Job could endure that time if God would limit it and not forget to resurrect him. But is resurrection possible? Pondering that faint possibility – *If a man dies, will he live again?* – Job said he was willing to wait out his hard service in this life, anticipating his “release.”

B. (:14-15) Faith Struggles with Questions about Eternity

*“If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my struggle I will wait,
Until my change comes.
15 Thou wilt call, and I will answer Thee;
Thou wilt long for the work of Thy hands.”*

Francis Andersen: The author's real convictions may be stated in the middle of a poem, flanked before and after by contrasting opinions which he rejects. **Verses 14–17** then constitute the high point of the speech, and reaffirm the faith already expressed in **chapter 13**, especially in **verse 15**.

John Hartley: With a renewed life would come a welcomed revitalization of Job's relationship with God. Their communication would be open and reciprocal. God would call or summon Job to court, and Job would answer him, i.e., defend himself (cf. **Habel**, OTL). Job would be vindicated. Then he would have fellowship with God, for once again God would yearn for the work of his own hands (*ma 'asēh yādēkā*; cf. **10:3**). The word for *yearn* or *long for* (*kāsap*) comes from the same root as the word "*silver*" (*kesep*). It may mean "*to turn pale*, i.e., the color of silver, from intense longing or desire" (**Pope**). It depicts the intensity of God's desire. When God seeks him again, Job will no longer feel that he is the spurned object of God's toilsome labor (**10:3**). Rather he will again have a life filled with the spontaneous joy that attends God's presence.

C. (:16-17) Future Hiding of Sins Preferred to Present Accountability

*"For now Thou dost number my steps,
Thou dost not observe my sin.
17 My transgression is sealed up in a bag,
And Thou dost wrap up my iniquity."*

Tremper Longman: **Verse 16** is a bit difficult because the two halves of the parallelism initially seem to say two different and somewhat contradictory things. It appears that Job contrasts God's attitude toward him now (*'attā*) with the hypothetical future attitude that Job hopes God would adopt toward him.

John Hartley: In the light of the context the imagery of **vv. 16–17** is taken to mean that God observes all of Job's ways, notices every failure, and stores up these errors in a bag or possibly keeps count of them by placing a stone in his bag for each sin. Instead of atoning for Job's sins or wiping them out, as some interpret the phrase *coat over my iniquity*, God merely daubs them with whitewash a coating that the rain of judgment will easily wash away. Thus Job's imaginative hope for a brighter future evaporates before his apprehension that worse affliction is in store for him.

V. (14:18-22) CANCELLATION OF HOPE AND PERSPECTIVE

Tremper Longman: **Fading hope.** In the previous section, Job had expressed his wish that God would put him into hibernation (so to speak) until his anger passed and he began to miss Job. However, in the final section of this final speech of the first cycle, Job comes back to what he thinks is reality. **Verses 18–19b** describe a **mountain**, a rather imposing and firmly established geographical feature, slowly but relentlessly being ground down to nothing. Rocks fall away, water from storms grind them down to nothing, and then the dust that remains is washed away. In the same way, says Job,

human hope, which may begin strong, is eroded by the storms of life until it is gone. Job blames God for this eradication of hope. God overpowers his creatures, changing their countenance from joyful hope to fear, anxiety, and depression. The story of Job has provided an example of this. He began the story with hope, and he worked hard to maintain a good relationship and a prosperous lifestyle and a happy family, but the sufferings God has brought into his life have changed all that.

A. (:18-20) Eroding Hope Culminates in Man's Departure

*“But the falling mountain crumbles away,
And the rock moves from its place;
19 Water wears away stones,
Its torrents wash away the dust of the earth;
So Thou dost destroy man's hope.
20 Thou dost forever overpower him and he departs;
Thou dost change his appearance and send him away.”*

Peter Wallace: In **verses 18-19**, Job concludes that there is no hope for man. Everything that seems solid proves transitory. Mountains look immovable – but over time, they fall and crumble. Water wears away stones – torrents wash away the soil. Even so, God destroys the hope of man.

John Hartley: Job expresses his fearful thoughts by reciting hymnic lines that recount God's awesome power as manifested in natural catastrophes. His mind muses on themes similar to those found in **9:5–10**. Mountains and boulders, symbols of prominence and steadfastness, crumble and move about in a great avalanche caused by God's appearing. Rushing water pulverizes stones, and a torrent, swelled by drenching rains and filled with debris, sweeps away the earth's soil, cutting deep trenches in the landscape. Such is the way of man's hope. It perishes before the overwhelming might of God's actions. Job is saying that his hope, like the landscape, has been scarred by ominous forces of destruction.

B. (:21-22) Escalating Pain Leads to Self-Absorption

*“His sons achieve honor, but he does not know it;
Or they become insignificant, but he does not perceive it.
22 But his body pains him,
And he mourns only for himself.”*

Elmer Smick: The waters of suffering will continue to erode till his bright hope is a dim memory (**v.19**) and nothing matters anymore but the pain of his body and the continual mourning of his soul (**v.22**).

David Thompson: Job was worn down. His hope was gone. His life had crumbled. Once he was a strong stone, but that strength had been washed away. God had overpowered Job and what he once was, was now gone. His strength and his stamina were gone. He was so distraught that he didn't even hurt over what had happened to his own family members.

Francis Andersen: The sadness of death is its loneliness. Unlike the dying patriarchs, who seemed to be looking forward to rejoining their ancestors, Job thinks only of separation from his family, in which alone he has his humanity in the relationships of life.

Meredith Kline: God's hostility culminates in the death stroke, cutting man off from rapport with this world, even from knowledge of his posterity (**14:21**), shutting him up to himself in death, to the endless dull pain of decomposition and the soul's dreary dirge (**14:22**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why must we cling to the sovereignty of God despite the perplexity of our situation?
- 2) What happens when man loses all hope?
- 3) What hints do you see here of the possibility of some type of resurrection?
- 4) How does a loss of hope distort one's perspective and one's theology?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: Job mourns the hardship of human life in general. Very troublesome to one in pain is the brevity of life. Inspired by the way new shoots grow from an old stump, Job wishes that he could die and then return to life. This hope quickly fizzles as he realizes that the human body is not like a tree—it has no inner reserve to give birth to a second life. Death for a human being is final. In desperation Job wonders if it would be possible for God to hide him in Sheol until his wrath subsides. But this wish fades before the reality of God's present treatment of him. Therefore, Job concludes by meditating on the terribleness of death. He realizes that if he is to find vindication, it must be in this life.

Job's words reveal the sense of futility that haunts him. But they also portray the steel nerve deep inside him that will neither let him succumb to his illness nor seek any easy solution that will relieve his pain by compromising his integrity. His struggling faith now and then compels him to make remarkable assertions of confidence in God. These assertions lead Job to persevere on the path of seeking God while he holds on to his integrity.

E.S.P. Heavenor: **14:1-6** -- It is strange, says Job, that divine justice should fasten on a creature like man. His existence is fleeting, troublous, and involved in the universal

sinfulness of humanity. Why then must a single individual, who is no heinous sinner, incur such a weight of divine displeasure? Cannot God grant the creature of a day a brief breathing-space from trouble?

7-12 – The fate of things is contrasted with the fate of persons, to the advantage of the former. A felled tree may sprout again, but death writes an inexorable “nevermore” on man’s life.

13-15 – The gloom of the picture penetrates Job’s spirit so profoundly that there is a dramatic revulsion from it. His soul soars up in quest for the light of a worth-while here-after. At present he feels the rod of the God of wrath across his shoulders. Presumably he must bear it while the present life lasts. But after that? He gives expression to the lovely dream of the God of grace granting him asylum, first in Sheol, the abode of the dead, and then calling him back to an existence in which He, the Creator, would yearn over the work of His hands. If I could believe that, says Job, “I could endure my weary post until relief arrived” (**:14b, Moff.**). They are the words of a man who cannot let go his faith in the God whose present dealings are a blank mystery to him; a man raising questions which Jesus alone can answer Cf. **Jn. 11:25; 2 Tim. 1:10**, etc.

16, 17 – The glory of the dream fades in the recollection of the grim facts of the present. The God of grace retires to the background and Job imagines a God who, miser-like, keeps constant check on every sin;

18, 19 – a God who pulverizes the mightiest works of nature and dashes the hopes of man.

20 – Death is the supreme trump card of man’s divine Antagonist.

21 – It makes man unable to rejoice in the rejoicings of the children he leaves behind, or to weep with them in their perplexities.

22 – It does not even mean the cessation of his own pain. This may refer to the terrible idea that the soul in Sheol had sympathy for the decomposing body, feeling the touch of corruption upon it.

Thomas Constable: In this melancholic lament Job bewailed the brevity of life (**Job 14:1-6**), the finality of death (**Job 14:7-17**), and the absence of hope (**Job 14:18-22**).

"Born of woman" (**Job 14:1**) reflects man’s frailty since woman who bears him is frail. **Job 14:4** means, *"Who can without God’s provision of grace make an unclean person clean?"* (cf. **Job 9:30-31; Job 25:4**). God has indeed determined the life span of every individual (**Job 14:5**).

It seemed unfair to Job that a tree could come back to life after someone had cut it down, but a person could not (**Job 14:7-10**). As I mentioned before, Job gives no

evidence of knowing about divine revelation concerning what happens to a human being after death. He believed in life after death (**Job 14:13**) but he did not know that there would be bodily resurrection from Sheol, the place of departed spirits (**Job 14:12**). [Note: See [Hartley](#), pp. 235-37.] He longed for the opportunity to stand before God after he entered Sheol (**Job 14:14**), to get the answers from God that God would not give him on earth.

Essentially, "Sheol" in the Old Testament is the place where the dead go. There was common belief in the continuing personal existence of one's spirit after death. When the place where unrighteous people go is in view, the reference is to hell. When the righteous are in view, Sheol refers to either death or the grave. [Note: See [A. Heidel](#), *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels*, ch. 3: "Death and Afterlife."]

God later revealed that everyone, righteous and unrighteous, will stand before Him some day (**Acts 24:15**; **Hebrews 9:27**; et al.), and God will resurrect the bodies of the dead (**1 Corinthians 15**). Job believed he would stand before God, though he had no assurance from God that he would (**Job 14:16**). Evidently Job believed as he did because it seemed to him that such an outcome would be right. He evidently believed in the theoretical possibility of resurrection but had no assurance of it. [Note: See [James Orr](#), "Immortality in the Old Testament," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 259.] When he finally had his meeting with God, Job was confident that God would clear him of the false charges against him.

The final section (**Job 14:18-22**) contains statements that reflect the despair Job felt as he contemplated the remainder of his life without any changes or intervention by God. All he could look forward to, with any "hope" or "confidence," was death.

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

Edward Gibson:

13:23-28 -- Expostulation with God for His treatment of him. Job now makes his appeal to God, or rather, since it is evident that we are not to suppose any appearance of God in answer to the challenge in **20-22**, he as it were rehearses what he would say if God were to take him at his word. He begins, then, by expostulating with Him much as he had done before in **chapters vii. and x.** Will not God tell him straight out what his sin is (**23**), and why He has turned from him and treats him as His enemy (**24**)? Is it worthwhile, for the sins of his boyhood, to treat him like a dangerous criminal to be put in the stocks and carefully watched, feeble and worn out as he is (**25-28**).

14:1-12 -- Contrast of the hopelessness of man's fate with the hope that there is for a tree. Leaving for the moment his own individual case, Job now thinks of the common lot of men, and of the way in which their days are few and evil, their life brief as the life of a flower, and passing away like a shadow (**1, 2**); and yet God is a rigorous judge of

such frail creatures (3)! Moreover man starts with a taint in his blood, and is not master of his fate. Why, then, will not God take His eyes off him, and give him a little respite (4-6)? Even a tree is better off than he is, for there is hope for it, even after it is cut down, since fresh shoots may spring up from the dry stock (7-9). But man has no such hope. For him death is final. He lies down and rises no more (10-12).

14:13-15 -- Expression of a longing for a 'hereafter' for man. He has just declared that for man death is final. But at once the thought occurs: what if it should prove not to be so? What if God would keep him only for a time in Sheol, and appoint a day in the distant future when He would remember him (13)? How gladly would he endure, and how patiently would he wait for his discharge if this could be (14)! God would then lovingly remember the work of His hands and summon him forth, and he would at once answer (15).

It is thus that the thought of a future life, and even more, of a resurrection struggles forth from Job's heart as an intense desire and longing, as a thought which, if he could only believe it, would not indeed solve the enigmas of life, but help him to 'bear the burden of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world.' At present it is no more than this. It is not belief, it is only desire. But even this is a great advance on his previous condition, when 'Sheol' with its gloomy shadowy existence bounded his horizon, and he conceived of nothing beyond. The thought and longing having once occurred to him, he can never quite let go of them; and they will lead in time to something more than desire, viz. to belief and conviction.

14:16-22 -- Closing complaints of present misery and hopelessness. The thought, however, seems too good to be true, for, as it is, God is on the watch, and notes and treasures up his sins, so as to visit them all upon him (16, 17). And just as the mountain crumbles away at last, or as the persistent falling of water will wear away the hardest rock, so God's unrelenting treatment must destroy man (18-20). His children may come to honour or meet with disgrace. But in the darkness of the grave, he will know nothing of it. Nothing can affect him there but his own pain and sorrow (21, 22).

TEXT: Job 15:1-35

TITLE: *ELIPHAZ'S SECOND SPEECH – TURNING UP THE HEAT*

BIG IDEA:

THE REBUKE FOR IMPIETY ESCALATES TO A FULL-SCALE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE DEMISE OF THE WICKED

INTRODUCTION:

Francis Andersen: As Job becomes more vehement, his friends become more severe. At first Eliphaz was gentle and courteous (4:2). Now his politeness diminishes, and he bluntly accuses Job of folly and impiety. If at first, with his great reputation (4:3f.), there had been doubt about Job's need for divine correction, now his irreverent words (2–6) show how empty are his claims to wisdom (7–16). He needs a fresh reminder of the fate of the wicked (17–35).

David Clines: The tonality of the speech, in line with its function, is sympathetic but firm; Job has spoken unwisely (vv 2–3), self-importantly (vv 7–9), and aggressively (vv 12–13), and he has adopted a position that ill becomes his piety (vv 4–5). He has abandoned proper reverence before God (v 4). He ignores fundamental truths about human nature (vv 14–16) and needs clear correction. There is some sarcasm in the speech, in the questions whether Job has not mistaken himself for the First Man, possessor of superhuman wisdom (vv 7–8), but the very extravagance of the sarcasm blunts its edge, and it seems that Eliphaz is administering a douche of cold water to Job to bring him to his senses rather than essentially attacking Job or attempting to humiliate him.

Elmer Smick: In vv.1–13, Eliphaz plies Job with questions designed to shame him into silence. Most of the speeches start with some form of insult, but Eliphaz surpasses all others with his vitriol and theological flourishes. **Verses 14–16** reveal again some interesting architectonics. These verses form an apex about which Eliphaz's words hinge. They derive from his vision in 4:17–19 and here state his thesis: **God's holiness versus humanity's corruption**. The remaining half of **chapter 15** is a dramatic description of the **dreadful fate of the wicked**.

Tremper Longman: Not surprisingly, since we have observed this at the beginning of the majority of speeches, Eliphaz begins by insulting Job. These insults are particularly noticeable, though, by virtue of their length and theological richness (vv. 1–10). Why, Eliphaz asks next, is Job so angry? Why is he surprised at his predicament? After all, God does not even trust his angels, so Job should know that he would not trust human beings (vv. 11–16). At this point, Eliphaz returns to his earlier argument (see, e.g., 4:6–11), a position shared by his two friends, that **only the wicked suffer**. His experience, as well as tradition, teaches this (vv. 17–24). The wicked, after all, have defied God, and so they will languish and ultimately perish (vv. 25–35).

Roy Zuck: In his first speech Eliphaz approached Job with a degree of decorum and courtesy, but not so this time. Now he lambasted the bereaved, dejected sufferer with the notion that he was a hardened sinner, disrespectful of his elders and defiant toward God.

Adam Clarke:

- Eliphaz charges Job with impiety in attempting to justify himself, **1-13**;
- asserts the utter corruption and abominable state of man, **14-16**;
- and, from his own knowledge and the observations of the ancients, shows the desolation to which the wicked are exposed, and insinuates that Job has such calamities to dread, **17-35**.

Andrew Bruce Davidson: The speech thus falls into two parts:

- First, vv. 2—16, Eliphaz's rebuke of Job's contemptuous treatment of his friends and assumption of superior wisdom, and his irreverence.
- Second, v. 17—35, the doctrine of Eliphaz regarding the wicked man's conscience and fate.

(:1) PROLOGUE

“Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,”

I. (:2-16) REBUKE FOR FOOLISH IMPIETY

John Hartley: In the first division Eliphaz delivers a **reprimand speech**. It comprises a mixture of rhetorical questions (vv. 2–3, 7–9, 11, 13, 14) and definitive statements (vv. 4–6, 10, 15–16). Eliphaz adopts this style to ridicule Job's self-defense. Also, taken aback by Job's passionate claim of innocence, he wants to persuade Job that the teaching of the wise, among whom the friends are numbered, far outweighs Job's knowledge. He believes that Job must abandon his claim to innocence, for his own words are proving him guilty, and certainly he must leave off his harsh complaints against God.

Serious Charges Levelled Against Job:

A. (:2-3) You Are Puffed Up with Useless Hot Air

*“Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge,
And fill himself with the east wind?
3 Should he argue with useless talk,
Or with words which are not profitable?”*

John Hartley: He is ridiculing Job, saying that his words flow from a belly filled with hot air, not from his heart, the center of reason. He thus judges Job's resolve to argue his case directly with God to be merely useless rhetoric. His words, being without value, will have no power to persuade God.

Tremper Longman; Eliphaz thinks Job's so-called wisdom is insubstantial like the wind. The idiom of v. **2b** is strikingly similar to a modern American one: Job is filled with "*hot air*." He has passion but no content.

B. (:4-6) You Are Irreverent with Crafty Speech

*"Indeed, you do away with reverence,
And hinder meditation before God.
5 For your guilt teaches your mouth,
And you choose the language of the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
And your own lips testify against you."*

David Thompson: v. 4 -- This charge is complete nonsense. Job had a greater reverence for God than any of these men ever had. God, Himself, said there was no man like him on this earth. Job had a reverence for God and a trust in his sovereignty when he had lost everything. Job had an ability to truly meditate and think about God's Word in levels way above and beyond any of these men. This charge that Job was a threat to sabotage sound reverence and worship of God is ludicrous. It all sounds so pious but it is devilish. When you are committed to understanding God's truth and doctrines, don't be surprised if the devil doesn't send some false accusers into your world who will question your relationship with God and your grasp of God's Word.

v. 5 -- The charge Eliphaz is making here is that Job has a crafty way of verbally getting around his guilt. He is basically telling Job that he knows how to use sound, theological arguments in a very crafty, sinful, evasive and artful way.

Francis Andersen: v. 4 -- Job is not only stupid; he is **dangerous**. His words are a **threat to sound religion**. The Hebrew has simply *fear*, but this is certainly short for the stock phrase '*fear of God*' which is attributed to Job in **1:1, 8; 2:3**, and equated with wisdom in **28:28**. NEB makes Job sabotage his own religion ('*you even banish the fear of God from your mind*'), while TEV makes Job undermine other people's religion ('*you discourage people from fearing God*'). If in fact here 'Eliphaz brands Job's dangerous ideas as a menace to society' (**Rowley**, p. 134), the point is not developed. The emphasis is on the **harm** Job is doing to himself.

John Hartley: Because Eliphaz cannot fathom that Job's complaints could possible come from a genuine search for meaning amid suffering, he can only conclude that Job is guilty of speaking too harshly against God.

C. (:7-10) You Are Egotistical with Arrogant Claims

*"Were you the first man to be born,
Or were you brought forth before the hills?
8 Do you hear the secret counsel of God,
And limit wisdom to yourself?
9 What do you know that we do not know?"*

*What do you understand that we do not?
10 Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
Older than your father.”*

Francis Andersen: To belittle Job’s utterances further, Eliphaz subjects him to a string of humiliating questions. It is an irony that his interrogation hits the style of the later interview with the Lord that Job will find so healing (**chapters 38ff.**). The present passage stands in **chiasmus** with the preceding, as Eliphaz’s initial charges of folly (**verses 2f.**) and irreligion (**4**) are elaborated in inverse order: iniquity (**5f.**) and ignorance (**7ff.**). . . The charges are not deserved. Job has made no such exaggerated claims. He had claimed only to be as intelligent as his friends (**12:3**), not to have a monopoly of knowledge (**verse 8**).

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz here emphasizes what he perceives throughout to be Job’s arrogance. He will not listen to the correction of others (**Prov. 3:11–12; 9:7–9; 12:1;** etc.), so he must restrict wisdom only to himself.

David Thompson: **vv. 7-16** -- All of these questions are based on exaggerated assumptions and all of them are designed to humiliate Job. There is no factual proof of anything they have alleged. These questions are not designed to ascertain truth; they are designed by Satan to further crush a faithful man of God. There are seven questions he presents to Eliphaz.

Question #1 - Were you the first human born? **15:7a**

Question #2 - Were you the first chronologically created? **15:7b**

Question #3 - Are you the only one who knows the secret things of God? **15:8**

Question #4 - Aren’t we as knowledgeable and as spiritual as you? **15:9-10**

Question #5 - Aren’t you listening to our godly consolations? **15:11**

Question #6 - Why are you drawing away from God and turning against God?
15:12-13

Question #7 - How can you think you are pure and righteous when no man is?
15:14-16

D. (:11-13) You Are Angry in Rejecting Godly Counsel

*“Are the consolations of God too small for you,
Even the word spoken gently with you?*

12 Why does your heart carry you away?

And why do your eyes flash,

*13 That you should turn your spirit against God,
And allow such words to go out of your mouth?”*

John Hartley: Eliphaz derides Job for not accepting the comforts of God. *God’s consolations* (*tanhumôt ’ēl*) are the words spoken gently by the friends, who represent God to Job and who utter the wisdom of the ages. Thus, in Eliphaz’s opinion, to reject their consoling advice is tantamount to rejecting God’s consolations. In particular,

Eliphaz means that Job has not heeded the message he had received in a vision (4:12–16). Therefore, Eliphaz reiterates that message at the end of this pericope (vv. 14–16).

Eliphaz is claiming that the flashing in Job’s eyes reveals his anger at God for punishing him. The word translated *anger*, *rûah* (lit. “wind, spirit”), may stand for a dominant mood, e.g., lust (Hos. 4:12), anger (Judg. 8:3; Prov. 16:32), or extreme displeasure (Eccl. 10:4). Eliphaz uses *rûah*, for he perceives that Job’s crafty thinking is controlled by his anger. That is why Job’s mouth is pouring out such caustic and reproachful words against God. Whereas Job has stated that his distress arises from being discredited (12:2–6; 13:1–12), Eliphaz says that the cause of his anger is **frustrated pride**.

E. (:14-16) You Are Detestable and Corrupt

*“What is man, that he should be pure,
Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?
15 Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones,
And the heavens are not pure in His sight;
16 How much less one who is detestable and corrupt,
Man, who drinks iniquity like water!”*

Elmer Smick: Eliphaz repeats the thought that came to him by “revelation” (4:17–19)—that a human being is too vile even to stand before God. That oracle has made a deep impression on the counselor.

Tremper Longman: Once again, Eliphaz repeats the argument that he made in his first speech (4:17–19) that humans are incapable of being pure or righteous. He points out that God does not even trust spiritual beings in heaven. Fallen humans are inherently corrupt. He does not state it explicitly, but the obvious conclusion is that human beings deserve whatever they get, and so by definition Job deserves what he gets. The only problem with Eliphaz’s argument is that he is wrong, and we, who have read **Job 1–2**, know that he is wrong about Job.

II. (:17-35) REMINDER OF THE DREADFUL FATE OF THE WICKED

John Hartley: In the second division, after requesting Job’s attention (vv. 17–19), Eliphaz, like a wisdom teacher, vividly describes the plight of the wicked person (vv. 20–35). That person is characterized as a tyrant who brazenly defies even God. For Eliphaz, the ways of nature guarantee that such a person will not escape his destined ill-fate. By implication he is warning Job of the consequences that will befall him if he does not repent from his stubborn way.

David Thompson: Eliphaz presents 15 lecture points, some of which are true and some of which are false. As it relates to Job it is all false:

Point #1 - The wicked will live a shortened life and a painful life. **15:20** = false
 Point #2 - The wicked will live a terrified life that lacks tranquility. **15:21** = false
 Point #3 - The wicked do not have any hope of deliverance. **15:22** = true
 Point #4 - The wicked live a life that lacks contentment due to pending judgment. **15:23** = false
 Point #5 - The wicked live a distressed life because he has arrogantly opposed God. **15:24-25** = false
 Point #6 - The wicked are insanely hostile against God, even charging Him. **15:26** = true
 Point #7 - The wicked are self-sufficient and self-indulgent. **15:27** = true
 Point #8 - The wicked live in places cursed by God. **15:28** = true
 Point #9 - The wicked do not gain an enduring wealth. **15:29** = true
 Point #10 - The wicked will not escape the judgment of God. **15:30** = true
 Point #11 - The wicked deceptively trusts in himself. **15:31** = true
 Point #12 - The wicked will not live to a ripe old age. **15:32** = false
 Point #13 - The wicked will go into eternity with an unfruitful life. **15:33** = true
 Point #14 - The wicked will end up barren. **15:34** = true
 Point #15 - The wicked have minds that are dark and deceptive. **15:35** = true

A. (:17-19) Call for Attention

*"I will tell you, listen to me;
 And what I have seen I will also declare;
 18 What wise men have told,
 And have not concealed from their fathers,
 19 To whom alone the land was given,
 And no alien passed among them."*

B. (:20-22) The Wretched State of the Wicked

1. (:20) He Lives in Pain for the Fixed Duration of His Life

*"The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
 And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless."*

2. (:21) He is Pursued by Terror

*"Sounds of terror are in his ears,
 While at peace the destroyer comes upon him."*

3. (:22) He Has No Hope of Deliverance

*"He does not believe that he will return from darkness,
 And he is destined for the sword."*

Thomas Constable: vv. 20-35 – Several troubles come on the wicked person because of his sin (vv. 20-35). He writhes in pain—the same Hebrew word describes labor pains—all his life (v. 20a; cf. 14:22). He dies earlier than the godly do (v. 20b; cf. 14:5). He has irrational fears (v. 21a). He suffers destruction while at peace (v. 21b; cf. 1:13-19; 12:6). He experiences torment by a guilty conscience (v. 22a). He feels he is a hunted

person (v. 22b). He is anxious about his basic needs (v. 23), and he feels distressed and in anguish (v. 24; cf. 7:14; 9:34; 13:21; 14:20). Job had confessed every one of these troubles. Eliphaz implied that Job had all the marks of a wicked man. He stressed the inner turmoil of the wicked in this list. He also reminded Job that God will destroy the wicked (v. 20).

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

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

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

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

John Hartley: v. 21 -- The wicked person is filled with anxiety. He continually hears terrifying sounds. Even when his dwelling place is at peace, i.e., free from threat, he imagines that a marauder is waiting in the shadows to assail him, for he knows that the quietest times are the most opportune for an opponent to make a surprise raid. Apprehensive that the worst is about to happen, he is startled by every noise. Never able to relax, he has no inner tranquility (cf. **Prov. 28:1**).

C. (:23-26) The Anxiety and Distress of the Wicked Who Oppose God

1. (:23) Anxiety

*"He wanders about for food, saying, 'Where is it?'
He knows that a day of darkness is at hand."*

2. (:24) Distress

*"Distress and anguish terrify him,
They overpower him like a king ready for the attack,"*

3. (:25-26) Opposition to God

*"Because he has stretched out his hand against God,
And conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty."*

26 *He rushes headlong at Him
With his massive shield."*

Francis Andersen: vv. 25-26 -- At its base, the wicked person's attitude to God is one of insane hostility, '*putting himself against the Almighty*' (NEB).

John Hartley: vv. 24-25 -- Thoughts about the *day of darkness*, i.e., the day of death, terrify the wicked. *Distress* [*šar*] and *anguish* [*mešûqâ*] overpower him. He feels as though a mighty king were commanding a swooping attack (*kîdôr*) against him. The reason for his great anguish is that he has defiantly *stretched out his hand* against God (cf. Isa. 5:25). Thinking that he possessed extraordinary strength, he vaunted himself against Shaddai. But now filled with terror, he faces the full punishment for his ruthless behavior.

v. 26 -- In his days of prosperity when he felt like an invincible champion, this tyrant welcomed any challenge. Protected by his armor, he felt invincible. His gallant victories have made him self-assured. In his new arrogance he believes that he could defeat even God, should such an opportunity present itself. His haughty presumption has grown out of the fact that he has been able to victimize the morally upright, those whom God is supposed to protect, without suffering any divine reprisals. In full armor and protected by a thick-bosSED shield, he charges at God with an outstretched neck.

Roy Zuck: Why such misfortunes? The reason, this verbal pugilist said, is that a sinner is defiant (*shakes his fist*) and arrogant against God (*vaunts himself*), attacking God head-on. This contradicted Job's words that God was attacking **him** (7:20; 13:24; cf. 19:11; 33:10).

Tremper Longman: Verses 25-27 begin by describing the heart of the crime of the wicked—their **defiance of God**. They stretched their hands against, not toward, God. In other words, they lifted their hands in violence and not in worship to God. In v. 25b the verb is from the root *gbr* in the Piel and means "to strengthen" or "to excel." In some contexts, this verb is positive (as when God strengthens his people; Zech. 10:6, 12), but for humans to strengthen themselves or attempt to excel over God is to **defy him**. The description of the defiance of the wicked continues as Eliphaz pictures them running toward God with a shield, as if to do battle.

D. (:27-29) The Futility of the Self Indulgence of the Wicked

*"For he has covered his face with his fat,
And made his thighs heavy with flesh.
28 And he has lived in desolate cities,
In houses no one would inhabit,
Which are destined to become ruins.
29 He will not become rich,
nor will his wealth endure;
And his grain will not bend down to the ground."*

John Hartley: v. 27 -- This boastful champion has forgotten that his style of living has robbed him of his great strength. Indulging himself in much feasting, his face has become chubby and fat enlarges his loins. This fat, at first symbolic of health (cf. **2 Sam. 1:22**), affluence, and ease, robs him of his agility and prowess. In similar fashion Jeremiah portrays the wicked as becoming wealthy through deeds of injustice and then growing fat and sleek (**Jer. 5:26–28**). Even though they have experienced no bounds to the success of their evil schemes, they will not escape God's punishment (**Jer. 5:29**). With this description of an arrogant warlord attacking God, Eliphaz is criticizing Job for his eagerness to dispute with God himself as the height of presumptuous arrogance.

v. 28 -- This mighty warlord pays a high price for his foolish arrogance. He is driven from his place of rule and can find lodging only in vacant, crumbling houses in a devastated city. Such a city was thought to be under God's curse; thus they were left a heap of ruins. No one dared even to venture near one, let alone rummage through it (**Deut. 13:13–17 [Eng. 12–16]; 1 K. 9:8; Jer. 19:8**).

v. 29 -- This person's wealth and authority will vanish quickly. Conceding that a wicked person might become rich for a season, Eliphaz states that his wealth will not endure and his possessions will not spread over the earth. That is, he will not be able to continue in power indefinitely. One day a mighty blow will knock him down so forcefully that he will never be able to recuperate his losses and rebuild his wealth.

E. (:30-32) The Inevitability of the Demise of the Wicked

*“He will not escape from darkness;
The flame will wither his shoots,
And by the breath of His mouth he will go away.
31 Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself;
For emptiness will be his reward.
32 It will be accomplished before his time,
And his palm branch will not be green.”*

Tremper Longman: Verse 30 takes a metaphorical turn, first describing the darkness that will permanently envelop these people and then using a botanical figure to describe their demise: their shoots will be dried up by flame, and their blossoms blown away by the wind. They may have been a fruitful plant at one point, but their end is certain and dire.

John Hartley: vv. 31-23 -- The wicked person who has been broken should not trust in vain, hoping that he will rule again. He is not like a broken tree which may again grow stalwart and yield fruit (cf. **14:7–9**). This is not his fortune, for his stately date palm will be worthless. *Before its day*, i.e., the harvest, it will wither. Its branches will turn brown, and its young fruit will drop off. Renewal is not possible for this tree, because an austere environment squeezes out its energy, its life. With this illustration from nature Eliphaz is discouraging Job's speculation that there might be hope beyond death for a person, a thought prompted by his observation that a felled tree may sprout again (**14:7–9**; cf. **Ps. 55:24 [Eng. 23]; Ps. 102:24 [Eng. 23]**).

F. (:33-35) Metaphors of the Barrenness of the Wicked

*“He will drop off his unripe grape like the vine,
And will cast off his flower like the olive tree.
34 For the company of the godless is barren,
And fire consumes the tents of the corrupt.
35 They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity,
And their mind prepares deception.”*

John Hartley: vv. 34-35 -- Eliphaz closes with metaphors picturing the **certainty** of the doctrine of retribution, particularly the tenet that the wicked assuredly suffer a hard fate. He first compares the failure of the wicked to **unprofitable farming**. The band of the profane is like *sterile soil* (*galmûd*; cf. **3:7**). No matter how many wicked join forces and no matter how hard they strive for their own success, they never reap a harvest, for they are working soil that is hard and sterile. In their pursuit of wealth and power this company is so notorious for offering bribes that their dwellings are labeled the *tents of the briber* (*’ohôlē šōḥaḏ*; cf. **Ps. 26:10**). With bribes they sought to corrupt the authorities and get their own way. Nevertheless, in due time they are judged: fire devours their tents. In Scripture fire is frequently the instrument God uses to punish the profane, whether it be the fire of war or lightning from heaven. Here it probably means that this band will fall prey to a raid in which their possessions will be consumed by fire.

Second, Eliphaz quotes a proverb using **birth language**. When an animal gives birth, its offspring is similar in looks and disposition to its parents. Likewise in the moral realm, if one conceives mischief or trouble (*’āmāl*; cf. **4:8; 5:6, 7**), he will surely bear iniquity (*’āwen*; cf. **Ps. 7:15 [Eng. 14]; Prov. 22:8**). **Bernhardt** points out that in passages like this one, Heb. *’āwen* has the sense of “self-deception, vanity.” That is, the one who mischievously plans to cause another person trouble for his own personal gain produces results that are not simply worthless to him—they even deceive him into thinking he has something when he has nothing. The second line, their womb fashions deceit (*mirmā*), reinforces this meaning. It is saying that what is conceived in mischief produces that which is unreliable, faulty, and treacherous. The use of womb (*beten*) ties the conclusion to the opening verse, where Eliphaz said that Job’s belly (*beten*) is filled with the east wind. Disparagingly Eliphaz is locating the source of Job’s trouble in his belly, charging that it is filled with hot air and deceitful thoughts.

Eliphaz’s description of the **demise of the wicked person** is powerful. Whoever benefits from wrongdoing enjoys greater and greater power, making his thoughts heady. The flame of his arrogance is fueled to the point that he defies even God. When he appears like a stately, enduring palm tree or like an olive tree covered with blossoms promising an abundant crop, God employs natural forces to dry up this proud tree. Over a period of time the arrogant evildoer experiences bad luck and serious reversals. Then one day a catastrophe destroys all his wealth and power. Overnight he is reduced to wandering, inhabiting desolate ruins. Plagued by physical distress and emotional agony,

he finds no rest. As a vagabond alone in the world with no sense of belonging, he falls prey to the terrors of death long before reaching a venerable age.

Peter Wallace: In **verses 31-35**, Eliphaz concludes by saying that the godless are empty and barren. In **chapter 14**, Job had used the image of a tree, saying that man was not like a tree – because even if a tree dies, it may put forth shoots. Now Eliphaz says that a man is like a tree – the wicked are like a barren tree, while the righteous (presumably) are like a fruitful tree.

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz's speech concludes (**vv. 34–35**) with the statement that the “*assembly of the godless*” will be barren (another metaphor of **ineffectiveness**). But worse than this barrenness, their tents will burn up. The last verse is one final description of the wicked. Here they are seen as giving birth to evil deeds, a metaphor also found in **Ps. 7:14** and **Isa. 59:4**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What specific charges did Eliphaz level against Job?
- 2) How would you describe the *consolations of God* in your life experience?
- 3) What does this passage teach about the apparent temporary prosperity of the wicked?
- 4) In what ways did Eliphaz structure his characterization of the wicked man to resemble the life of Job in order to bring about conviction of sin?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

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

In the second cycle of speeches, Job's companions did not change their minds about why Job was suffering and the larger issue of the basis of the divine-human relationship. They continued to hold the dogma of retribution: that God without exception blesses good people and punishes bad people in this life. **Galatians 6:7** says, “*Whatever a person sows, this he will also reap.*” However, it is wrong to conclude that we will inevitably reap what we sow before we die. Our final judgment will come after

death. Job and his friends lacked this long view of life and focused on life before death. The Book of Ecclesiastes also takes the short view of life.

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

David Clines: The fundamental key for the interpretation of this speech is the recognition that the depiction of the wicked in **vv 20–35** is a depiction of what Job is not. It opens the way to see the speech as a whole as an encouragement to Job, in essential accord both with Eliphaz's first speech (**chaps. 4–5**) and with his third (**chap. 22**). From Eliphaz's point of view, Job's present rash and, frankly, sinful words apart, Job is at bottom a righteous man whose innocence Eliphaz admires. Job has nothing to fear from the present suffering he endures at God's hand, for it is but an epiphenomenon upon the ordered course of a prosperous and devout life. The mental anguish that the godless suffer all their days (**vv 20–22**) is not Job's experience, nor can their end, "*marked down for the sword*" (**v 22**), "*cast out as food for the vultures*" (**v 23**), their "*blossom swept away by the wind*" (**v 30**), ever be his.

Job has two faults, nevertheless—an **intellectual** one and a **moral** one. The intellectual wrong is not to recognize that even the most upright of humanity is tainted in God's sight (**vv 14–16**). Perfect innocence such as Job lays claim to, innocence that can admit no cause at all in oneself for divine punishment, is not within the grasp of humankind; and Job as a member of the theological guild ought to know that and recognize its bearing upon himself. As it is, he is victim of the sin of intellectual pride, which imagines itself more gifted than the commonality (**v 9**) and which in the fever of supposed new insights abandons the meditative and consensual habits of his class (**v 4**).

Job's moral fault is not to bear the suffering that has come his way with fortitude and patience. The fault that has earned him his suffering is insignificant by comparison with the wrong he now perpetrates by his present behavior. It is a wrong against himself (**v 6**) and against God (**v 13**) to speak so one-sidedly and perversely about God. The animation of Job's language is its own condemnation, it appears (**vv 12–13**); the truly wise is prudent and calm in speech. It is not as though from Eliphaz's point of view what Job says about God is wholly wrong; for has not Job quoted the traditional language of piety in **12:13–25**, for example? It is the perverse design in Job's speeches, that care for nothing but evidences of divine hostility, and the intemperate language, which rejects the values of the academy, that trouble Eliphaz and call forth this firm rejoinder.

Elmer Smick: In **verses 27–35** the caricature continues with a variety of figures—the fat, rich, wicked man who finally gets what he deserves (**vv.27–32**). He is like a grapevine stripped before its fruit is ripe or an olive tree shedding its blossoms (**v.33**).

As long as Eliphaz rejects the notion that the wicked prosper and its corollary that the innocent sometimes suffer, he will never have to wrestle over the disturbing mystery of how this fits with the justice of God. Eliphaz views humanity as either all good or all bad. He allows no room for a good man to have doubts and struggles, and those who are bad Eliphaz wants to reduce to zero.

In his query “*What is man, that he could be pure?*” (vv.14–16), Eliphaz’s view of humanity comes through clearly. There is nothing in his words that leads one to the conclusion that God has any love for sinful human beings. Indeed, the deity Eliphaz worships is mechanical; he behaves like the laws of nature, so sinners can expect no mercy. The sinner always gets paid in full—trouble and darkness, terror and distress, the flame and the sword. God will see to it.

In describing such a fate, Eliphaz makes sure that all the things that have happened to Job are included—fire consumes (vv.30, 34; cf. 1:16), marauders attack (v.21; cf. 1:17), possessions are taken away (v.29; cf. 1:17), and houses crumble (v.28; cf. 1:19). Although the modern reader often misses the point that these barbs are all directed at Job, we can be sure that Job himself feels their sting.

Steven Lawson: Advice as to how to comfort people (*Job*, pp. 139-140):

- 1) Shorten your words—silence does console.
- 2) Season your words—use kind, sensitive words.
- 3) Scrutinize your words—use words that are accurate biblically

David Guzik: **Spurgeon** suggested what some of the *consolations of God* are that are considered by some to be too small and neglected or rejected:

- The consolations of God are applied by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter.
- Jesus is the substance of these consolations, for He is called “*The Consolation of Israel*” (Luke 2:25)
- The consolations of God deal with our problem of sin; its guilt and stain and power.
- The consolations of God assure us of a new heart and nature.
- The consolations of God reveal a reason for sorrow that remains.
- The consolations of God show us One who suffers with us; Jesus Christ.
- The consolations of God compensate us for all trials and sufferings.
- The consolations of God tell us of our heavenly destination and hope.

Albert Barnes: Eliphaz, not a little incensed that Job should pay no regard to his advice, and should dare to challenge the Almighty to argue the point with him, charges him with **self-conceit** in entertaining too high an opinion of his own knowledge; with **arrogance** in undervaluing the arguments drawn from their experience, whose age was a sufficient voucher for their wisdom; and with **impiety**, in thus rudely challenging the Almighty to answer for his conduct in afflicting him. He presses home the same argument upon him a second time, to which he adds that of **universal tradition**; insinuating, that he had yet worse to expect unless he prevented it by a contrary

conduct: and then presents him with a picture of the final state of a wicked man; in which he so works up the circumstances as to make it resemble Job and his condition as much as possible; intimating thereby, that he imagined him to be that very wicked man he had been describing, and that he had by that means drawn down God's judgments on himself: that, therefore, his imaginations of innocence were an illusion; but one, however, of the worst kind; he had deceived himself.

TEXT: Job 16:1 – 17:16

TITLE: *JOB'S GROWING COMPLAINT AND URGENT APPEAL TO GOD FOR VINDICATION*

BIG IDEA:
DESPONDENCY SETS IN AS THE TIME FOR VINDICATION EVAPORATES

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: The structure of this fifth speech of Job is not so clear as in other speeches. As often, the **direction of address** is a helpful clue to structure.

We may then perhaps display the structure thus:

- A. To the friends **16:2–6**
 - B. To himself **16:7–17**
 - C. To Earth **16:18(?–22)**
 - C'. To God **17:1–5**
- A'. To the friends **17:6–10**
 - B'. To himself **17:11–16**

The strophic structure is plain:

<u>Strophe</u>	1	16:2–6	6 lines	
	2	16:7–11	5	(v 10 a tricolon)
	3	16:12–14	4	
	4	16:15–17	3	
	5	16:18–22	5	
	6	17:1–5	5	(v 1 a tricolon)
	7	17:6–10	5	
	8	17:11–16	6	(v 11 a tricolon)

John Hartley: After an opening complaint (**16:1–6**), Job bewails his miserable lot. He is addressing his words to God (**16:17–17:16**), words that feature a mixture of **lamenting** and **judicial language**. When he thinks of proving his innocence in court, Job's faith reaches a new height as he states that he has a witness in heaven who will defend his honor (**16:18–22**). These thoughts also lead him to petition God to stand security for him in order that he might be released from his present affliction while awaiting his vindication (**17:3**). Thus through the legal metaphor Job finds a way to seek a resolution to his complaint. Nevertheless, his deep personal sorrow continues to echo throughout his lamenting. This speech is divided into four sections:

- a dispute with the comforters (**16:1–6**);
- a personal lament with a complaint against God (**16:7–17**);
- the heavenly witness (**16:18–22**);
- and a personal lament (**17:1–16**).

Francis Andersen: The inferences from Eliphaz's words to Job's case are obvious. If Job has been as good as he claims, he would never have had such troubles. Since troubles have come, he must be wicked. And if he does not admit it, he is a hypocrite besides. Against these insinuations, barely concealed in Eliphaz's latest speech, Job protests with even greater indignation. He holds more tenaciously to two facts: he is guilty of no grave fault, and God is entitled to do what he pleases. But it is infinitely painful to Job that God is now inexplicably acting like an enemy. Eliphaz's trite words do not even begin to touch on this awful fact.

Warren Wiersbe: Job's response is to utter three heartfelt requests:

- first, a plea to his friends for **sympathy (16:1-14)**;
- then, a plea to God for **justice (16:15-22)**;
- and finally, a plea to God to **end his life** and relieve him of suffering (**17:1-16**)

(16:1) PROLOGUE – JOB ANSWERS HIS FRIENDS

“Then Job answered,”

I. (16:2-6) CRITICISM OF JOB'S COUNSELORS FOR THEIR WORTHLESS WORDS – “YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN MY COMFORTERS”

A. (:2) No Comfort from Job's Comforters

*“I have heard many such things;
Sorry comforters are you all.”*

David Thompson: All three of these guys were saying the same thing. Job had heard it all before. They were all saying he had secret sin in his life and if he confessed it God would lift the judgment against him. Problem is Job did not have any secret sin in his life. He had done nothing to deserve this and he was pure and right in his relationship with God. . .

Instead of them standing with Job and defending his character and ministering to Job and comforting him, they increased his sorrow and trouble by their verbal attacks. They added more weight to Job's misery. They did this by their words. Words have the power to do this kind of thing.

John Hartley: The byword *miserable comforters* is a pungent oxymoron; i.e., the more words they speak to comfort, the more pain they inflict.

B. (:3) No Value in Windy Words

*“Is there no limit to windy words?
Or what plagues you that you answer?”*

John Hartley: With a biting rhetorical question Job charges Eliphaz with uttering *windy words* (*dibṛê rūaḥ*), i.e., eloquent speech devoid of content. He is directly countering

Eliphaz's reproach that his knowledge is *empty wind* (15:2) and Bildad's retort that his words are a *mighty wind* (8:2). Next Job asks Eliphaz what irritates (*himrîš*) him so much that he feels compelled to keep answering. Job cannot fathom why Eliphaz is so upset with him.

David Thompson: Each man felt like he had to speak and it was like a plague that destroys. Each person felt led to speak against Job. Each person really believed he had something important to say in his attack against Job. Job had lost his wealth, children and health and reputation and each one of these men truly felt like it was their responsibility to say something. Just because one feels something doesn't make it right or from God. This plague was coming directly from Satan.

C. (:4-5) No Comparison if Roles Were Reversed

1. (:4a) Imagine Role Reversal – Me Counseling You

*"I too could speak like you,
If I were in your place."*

David Thompson: Job says you have options as to what you can say when a faithful person is hurting. You can use your speech to hurt and destroy or you can use it to help.

2. (:4b) Possibility of Attacking Words

*"I could compose words against you,
And shake my head at you."*

3. (:5) Probability of Encouraging Words

*"I could strengthen you with my mouth,
And the solace of my lips could lessen your pain."*

John Hartley: Job speculates about how he would act if their places were reversed. Indeed, he would speak with the same eloquence as his friends. Although much of his rhetoric would be the same as theirs, he would show more **sympathy**. He would join words to bring comfort (vv. 4c, 5a) and shake his head in sympathy (vv. 4d, 5b). He would not restrain his trembling lips from uttering supportive words. Job is saying that he has expected far more consolation from his friends than he has received.

D. (:6) No Relief in Speech or Silence for Job

*"If I speak, my pain is not lessened,
And if I hold back, what has left me?"*

John Hartley: Job breaks off his thought abruptly with a brief apology for his continued speaking. He uses cohortatives, *I speak* ('*aḏabberâ*) and *I resist* ('*aḥḏelâ*), for **emphasis**. Since his pain is not eased with his speaking nor does it leave him when he resists speaking, he sees no advantage in keeping silent. So he decides to keep on speaking in the hope of capturing God's attention. He pours out to God a **despairing lament**, though tempered with a **ray of hope**.

David Clines: But to what end is all this talk of talk, these words about speaking? Job's experience is that speech and silence are both alike incapable of assuaging his suffering. He has experimented with silence and with speech; he has restrained his mouth (2:10) and he has opened it (3:1); he has spoken in the anguish of his spirit (7:11), but he would as well be silent since his own mouth condemns him in God's presence (9:20). And he has experienced also the friends' silence (2:13) and their speeches; and he now knows from their speech that their silence was not the silence of sympathy but the amazed silence of horror at the enormity of his crime. Silence and speech from them have been equally ineffectual, equally judgmental, equally misdirected.

II. (16:7-17) COMPLAINT AGAINST GOD FOR ADVERSARIAL MISTREATMENT – “YOU SHOULD HAVE PROTECTED ME”

David Thompson: What we cannot help but be impressed with during this discussion is Job's continued view of the **sovereignty of God**. Not once does he curse God, but he continues to maintain an awesome view of God's sovereignty, even in his own suffering. There are nine facts Job believed about God:

- God has sovereignly brought Job to the point of exhaustion. **16:7a**
- God has sovereignly permitted his company to be a waste. **16:7b**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to physically deteriorate. **16:8**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to be attacked by an adversary. **16:9**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job's adversaries to verbally attack him. **16:10**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to be dominated by those wicked. **16:11**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to be taken from a life of ease to a target of chaos. **16:12**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to be attacked physically. **16:13**
- God has sovereignly permitted Job to be persistently attacked. **16:14**

A. (:7-11) Reprehensibly Attacked by Both God and His Evil Instruments of Destruction

1. (:7) Attacks that Have Proved Exhausting and Devastating

*“But now He has exhausted me;
Thou hast laid waste all my company.”*

John Hartley: Feeling the stab of Eliphaz's point that judgment falls on the entire company of the profane (15:34), Job counters that it is God who is making him look like a godless man by destroying his entire household.

2. (:8) Accusatory Testimony of My Emaciated Body

*“And Thou hast shriveled me up,
It has become a witness;
And my leanness rises up against me,
It testifies to my face.”*

John Hartley: Even more disturbing is the trouble brought by his trial, the severity of his Physical illness coupled with its condemning testimony. God has *shriveled up* (*qāmaṭ*) Job. His body has become a painful cage. And the community interprets his skinny body as proof that he has sinned arrogantly. The sores and wrinkles in his body are the convicting evidence that he is guilty. God has split Job in two, so to speak. His body witnesses against his own words. As a result, no one who sees him believes his verbal testimony of innocence.

David Clines: **Verse 8**, despite some uncertainties (reflected in the variant translations of RSV, JB, NEB and NAB, for example), seems to mean that Job's **emaciated condition**, for which God is responsible, serves as proof—to everyone but Job—that Job is a dreadful sinner. His “leanness” is a witness against his innocence so long as the doctrine of exact retribution is operative. Job's gauntness, of which we hear nowhere else, is hardly to be explained clinically as a result of his skin disease; it is a mark of his mental suffering, and is perhaps more something felt by Job than observed by his companions. The thought belongs to that complex of ideas in which fatness signifies prosperity which in turn signifies divine pleasure (cf. **21:23–24; 15:27**) and thinness signifies what is **dried up, devoid of life**. The psychic sense of being dried up has previously come to expression in the images of the wind-driven leaf and withered straw (**13:25**) and, by contrast, in the image of the tree whose root decays but may nevertheless burst into new life at the scent of water (**14:7–9**).

Job is helpless against the criticism of his friends if his own physical appearance is testimony of his wrongdoing. His cause is lost if anything but his own inner conviction of his integrity is taken into account; God, the friends, his speech, his suffering and even his own body are witnesses against him.

3. (:9) Adversarial Opposition from an Angry God

*“His anger has torn me and hunted me down,
He has gnashed at me with His teeth;
My adversary glares at me.”*

John Hartley: Job fervently laments God's brutal treatment. God's anger is burning so hotly against him that he perceives that God is his adversary (*ṣar*). In accusing God of assailing him Job uses the Hebrew word *śāṭam*, “*hate actively*” (**Driver-Gray**), which is similar in sound to, if not directly related to, Heb. *śāṭān*, “*prosecutor, satan*” (cf. **1:6**). Unable to fathom God's role in his affliction, Job fears that God has become his enemy. Here Job comes close to reconstructing the scenes of the heavenly counsel in the prologue, but he turns them inside out. He identifies God as his enemy rather than as his advocate. At this crucial point he is tested to the ultimate. From his perspective he is led to wonder if the God in whom he has trusted is not in reality his **satan**.

Francis Andersen: **vv. 9-14** -- Only literal translation can do justice to the savagery of Job's description of God's vicious attack. He is like a ferocious beast (**9f.**), a traitor (**11**), a wrestler (**12a, b**), an archer (**12c, 13a**), a swordsman (**13b, 14**). **Verse 11** explicitly names God as the assailant; but the plural in **verse 10** suggests that Job is also

complaining about God's human allies (his '*friends*' he calls them in **verse 20**, heavy with sarcasm).

4. (:10) Abused by the Contempt Shown by the Masses

*"They have gaped at me with their mouth,
They have slapped me on the cheek with contempt;
They have massed themselves against me."*

John Hartley: Job's sorrow is multiplied as the masses revile him with gestures and insulting blows. Seated on the dung heap outside the city gate, Job has become a spectacle attracting the attention of all. The passersby gape at him with wide open mouths, a gesture expressive of their disdain. They slap Job's cheeks contemptuously and reproach him with taunts and insulting gestures. The lower the status of the mockers, the more insulting are their jeers against a nobleman. In their gaping mouths (**v. 10a**) and their slapping of his cheeks (**v. 10b**) Job sees God's gnashing teeth (**v. 9b**) and his piercing eyes (**v. 9c**). This loss of dignity is just as agonizing for Job as the excruciating physical pain, since a person gets much of his identity and personal worth from his society; in rejecting one of its members a community inflicts severe emotional pain.

5. (:11) Abandoned by God to Harsh Treatment from the Wicked

*"God hands me over to ruffians,
And tosses me into the hands of the wicked."*

John Hartley: Job states the reason that he has become an object of scorn: God has turned me over to the vicious. Instead of his punishing the wicked as the friends have described (**8:22b; 11:20; 15:20–34**), God has tossed him into the hands of the wicked. Given free rein by God they shame Job wrongfully and make his ill-fate unbearable.

Tremper Longman: But then **v. 10** turns to his human adversaries, who also are determined to bring him down. Job is being attacked, or so he thinks, from above and below. They speak against him; they physically abuse him. They congregate against him in a way that suggests mob violence. But even in his human adversaries, Job sees the hand of God. These people are after him because God has turned him over to them (**v. 11**). The way Job sees it, he is innocent and his attackers are wicked.

B. (:12-14) Relentlessly Assaulted by God

1. (:12a) Shaken Me By My Neck

*"I was at ease, but He shattered me,
And He has grasped me by the neck and shaken me to pieces;"*

John Hartley: Job's lament crescendos to an emotional peak in **vv. 12–14**, as evidenced by the poetic style: two tristichs, the use of assonance, and vivid word pictures. Job contrasts his former blissful state with God's sudden onslaught. The attack was so surprising and so fierce that Job the victim has been left shattered. Like a strong man God seizes him by the nape of the neck (cf. **Gen. 49:8**) and administers a torturous

beating. Or like a marksman God has set Job up as a target (cf. **Job 6:4; 7:20; Lam. 3:12**). Taking careful aim, he shoots scores of arrows at the target with no relenting. Many hit Job's vital midsection, piercing his kidneys and spilling his gall on the ground (cf. **Ps. 38:3 [Eng. 21; 64:8 [Eng. 7]**). Mortally wounded, he is left alone with no hope of physical recovery.

Another picture likens God to a mighty warrior (*gibbôr*), marshalling his troops against a fortified city. Each surge renders breach after breach in the wall. Soon the city is razed. So too Job has been besieged. The disease has destroyed one member of his body after another. Only death awaits him. This picture contrasts sharply with Eliphaz's perception that Job is an armed warrior attacking God (**15:26**).

2. (:12b-13a) Targeted Me with His Arrows

*"He has also set me up as His target.
His arrows surround me."*

3. (:13b) Gutted Me

*"Without mercy He splits my kidneys open;
He pours out my gall on the ground."*

4. (:14) Assaulted Me with Military Tactics

*"He breaks through me with breach after breach;
He runs at me like a warrior."*

Tremper Longman: Verse 14 changes the metaphor again when Job is likened to a city that has been successfully besieged and breached. Once the wall comes down, the warriors (in this case, the warrior God) runs in for the kill.

David Clines: The final military image is of the ultimate stage in any assault on a city: the breaching of its walls and the storming in of the enemy troops. After the archery that assails him from a distance (in **12c** from the archer's perspective, in **13b-c** from the target's) comes the nearer approach of his enemy to batter on his very self. Job is the besieged city, God the stormtrooper intent upon breaching his defenses. For the imagery, cf. **30:14; Ps 80:13 [12]; 89:41 [40]; Amos 4:1; 1 Kgs 11:27; Isa 5:5; Neh 3:35 [4:3]**. First God acts like an overwhelming army, inflicting one breach after another upon the city's walls (for the idiom, cf. "*disaster upon disaster*," **Jer 4:20**). Then he acts like a champion in single-handed combat, like a Goliath or "*mighty warrior*" (cf. **1 Sam 2:4; Jer 46:12; Hos 10:13**) rushing upon his individual foe. The sack of the city has one man's defeat as its object. Job is both the city and its lone inhabitant; the flow of the imagery mirrors the onward rush of the invader.

C. (:15-17) Response of Job to Such Adversarial Mistreatment

Elmer Smick: Here we see a **pathetic figure** in sackcloth, sitting with brow in the dust, eyes sunken and face bloated with tears, avowing innocence. From this sad figure arises a baneful cry, but one that has not totally lost hope, as **vv.18–21** show.

David Thompson: There are five descriptions that Job gives of himself:

- Job was completely humiliated. **16:15**
- Job was emotionally depressed. **16:16a**
- Job was physically deteriorated. **16:16b**
- Job had done nothing violent to deserve this. **16:17a**
- Job was absolutely pure in his life and in his prayers. **16:17b**

1. (:15-16) Profound Suffering, Mourning and Humiliation

*“I have sewed sackcloth over my skin,
And thrust my horn in the dust.
16 My face is flushed from weeping,
And deep darkness is on my eyelids,”*

Tremper Longman: He does more than don sackcloth, indicative of grief; he also sews it over his skin. Mourning has become part and parcel of who he is. In other contexts of grief, the mourners not only put on sackcloth but also throw dust on their heads (**Lam. 2:10; Ezek. 27:30–31**). Job’s suffering is so profound that he takes his head (*horn*) and sticks it in the dust. The use of “*horn*” for head evokes an animal image. A proud, confident animal lifts its horns high. Job’s movement downward is the exact physical and emotional opposite.

His grief and pain also lead to incessant weeping, which turns his face red and his eyelids black (perhaps referring to the dark circles that appear with lack of sleep and worry). He finally protests that there is no violence on his part and his prayer is pure. Outwardly and inwardly he does nothing to deserve his fate.

2. (:17) Protestations of Innocence

*“Although there is no violence in my hands,
And my prayer is pure.”*

Roy Zuck: Yet Job was free of violence, not ruthless as Eliphaz had suggested (**15:20**), and his praying was from pure motives, not selfish ones. So his ordeal was unexplainable. Why should he be in such torment when he was not a terrible person?

John Hartley: Job grounds the intensity of his lament in his **innocence**. Because he has done no violence and his prayer is **pure**, he cries out for vindication. Job chooses language similar to that found in the liturgy of confession that worshipers made before entering the temple precinct (cf. Ps. 24:4). Job is confessing that he has done no wrong. There is no transgression of his which could be the reason for the hostile way God is treating him. He asserts that his prayer is pure. His words have been spoken to God honestly and fervently. He has not uttered empty or false words merely to get God to help him. An ancient worshiper believed that God would more likely answer a prayer from pure motives (cf. **Ps. 17:1**). Job is earnestly seeking to move God to respond to him through his words, even though these words are filled with a biting complaint

against God's treatment of him. The daring of Job's approach is only tempered by his uncompromising search for an encounter with God.

David Clines: we have here the reason why Job is grief-stricken: it is not the loss of his children or his own pain, but the fact of his innocence. The contrast is not between the weeping and the innocence, but between the divine assaults (of vv 7–14) and the innocence. His weeping results from God's refusal to acknowledge his innocence.

III. (16:18-22) CALL FOR VINDICATION FROM HEAVEN – “I NEED YOU TO BE MY ADVOCATE ON HIGH”

Francis Andersen: Job supports his self-vindication by an appeal to the earth and the sky (cf. **Isa. 1:2**), the sleepless watchers of men's actions and guardians of ancient covenants, as witnesses of his murder. His use of the word blood implies that he expects to die (22) before his cry for redress is heard.

A. (:18) Suffering Calls for Vindication

*“O earth, do not cover my blood,
And let there be no resting place for my cry.”*

Warren Wiersbe: Job was caught on the horns of a dilemma. His suffering was so great that he longed to die, but he didn't want to die before he could vindicate himself or see God vindicate him. This explains his cry in **verse 18**. . . The ancients believed that the blood of innocent victims cried out to God for justice (**Gen. 4:8-15**) and that the spirits of the dead were restless until the corpses were properly buried (**Isa. 26:21**). Even if Job died, he would be restless until he had been proved righteous by the Lord.

B. (:19) Vindication Can Only Come from Heaven

*“Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And my advocate is on high.”*

John Hartley: Since there is no earthly party who will come to his defense, Job asserts that his witness is in heaven, he will testify to his innocence. This heavenly witness is his defender. Who is this heavenly defender? Is it an angel or some other heavenly creature? Considering the various passages in which Job thinks about arguing his case before God, the best candidate for the defender that can be found is **God himself**. While it is difficult to think that God would serve as witness against himself, as **Mowinckel** argues, the concept is not impossible. In fact, the whole drama of redemption centers around the antinomy between God's justice that is sometimes expressed in wrath toward sinful man and his love that reaches out to redeem that same sinful man. For love to be genuine, it must be true to justice. In his redeeming work God is motivated by love and acts true to justice. Here Job appeals to God's holy integrity in stating his earnest hope that God will testify to the truth of his claims of innocence, even though such testimony will seem to contradict God's own actions. Such risking is the essence of faith. For a moment Job sees God as his steadfast supporter. In this plea he is

expressing the trust God had expressed in him in the prologue because he is pushing through the screen of his troubles to the real God. He is not essentially pitting God against God; rather he is affirming genuine confidence in God regardless of the way it appears that God is treating him. Since Job, in contrast to his friends, will not concede that truth is identical with appearances, he presses on for a true resolution to his complaint from God himself.

Francis Andersen: God is the one who hears the cry of shed blood; and God is the one who is said to be on high. And Job has consistently appealed to God.

Tremper Longman: Job speaks of a help in heaven that he wishes for but, in his mind at least, does not exist. This interpretation seems confirmed by the fact that in the story of Job no umpire, no witness, ever steps forward to help him.

Roy Zuck: Job wanted a spokesman, a kind of heavenly defense attorney who could speak on God's level. Job's companions had not spoken on his behalf, so he needed someone who would.

C. (:20-21) Expected Supporters Have Let Job Down = Failed to Vindicate Him

1. (:20a) Let Down by Earthly Friends

"My friends are my scoffers;"

2. (:20b) Let Down by Heavenly Silence

"My eye weeps to God."

3. (:21) Let Down by Lack of Appeal Process

*"O that a man might plead with God
As a man with his neighbor!"*

John Hartley: Job declares confidently that his **interpreter** is his friend. The interpreter is one who advocates a party's case, explaining the situation to the court and defending him against any charges. Who could that party be save God himself in the light of the last verse. That is, as Job's interpreter he will argue the merits of his case with God just as between a man and his fellow, i.e., just as human beings do. Since Job's earthly friends have failed him, God will take their place by defending his accused friend, even before himself. No wonder these great thoughts cause Job's eyes to flow with tears.

E.S.P. Heavenor: This passionate longing for a heavenly Witness on his side strikingly points forward to the Christian thought of "*an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 Jn. 2:1). Here faith is reaching out for a "*God for us*". Again, Jesus alone can answer Job. Cf. Heb. 9:24.

D. (:22) Vindication is Urgently Needed

*"For when a few years are past,
I shall go the way of no return."*

John Hartley: Job underlines his plea with a note of **urgency**. He reminds God that if his petition is not granted, he will perish in dishonor. His end is approaching so fast that he can count the few years left. Soon he will descend to hell on the way that allows no return (cf. 7:9). In the realm of the dead he will have no way to defend his reputation. What is decided must be decided on earth. So the closer death approaches, the more urgent his cry for help becomes. Such reasoning, i.e., that the faithful servant will be unable to praise God in the land of the dead, is frequently found in OT prayers, for the distressed petitioner is groping for some way to motivate God to act redemptively (cf. **Ps. 30:10–11 [Eng. 9–10]**). The appeal is that it is imperative for God to attend to the cry for help for his own sake, attesting his commitment to the upright and to the honor of his name among men.

IV. (17:1-5) CHARGE LEVELED AGAINST THOSE MOCKING JOB AND CONTRIBUTING TO HIS DESPONDENCY – “YOUR MOCKERY OF ME HAS PUT YOUR FAMILIES IN JEOPARDY”

David Clines: vv. 1-17 – Job has confidence in the rightness of his cause, but he has no expectation that he will live to see his innocence vindicated. As in all his previous speeches, he moves in the end to the contemplation of death, for that is the one certainty in his future, and he feels its near approach. The whole of this chapter revolves about the **contrast of “hope” and “death”**: in v 1 the absence of hope is expressed by the language of the **imminence of death**, in vv 13–16 its absence is explained by his feeling of **being kin with death**. There is, intermixed with these prevailing expressions of hopelessness, some caustic criticism of the friends and the sanctimoniously righteous in general; the train of thought is at several points obscure, and the exact sense of several lines remains a mystery.

A. (:1) Expression of Despondency

*“My spirit is broken,
my days are extinguished,
The grave is ready for me.”*

John Hartley: With great emotion Job expresses the depth of his despair in three short lines. His spirit (*rûah*), the desire for life in him, has been broken. Depression is robbing his inner resources for bearing his shame. His days are about to run out. The graveyard awaits him. Completely disgraced, he will be buried in a common grave (*qeber*) instead of receiving honorable interment in a noble sepulcher.

Francis Andersen: There is no break between the chapters. Thoughts already expressed crowd together in brief, jumbled sentences.

B. (:2) Exposure of the Mockers Provoking His Depression

*“Surely mockers are with me,
And my eye gazes on their provocation.”*

David Clines: The glance at the mockery that surrounds him forms a reason for his loss of spirit. For Job to endure mockery, which is specifically a castigation of him as a hypocrite and a denial of his righteousness (cf. on **12:4–5**), is a debilitating experience. He does not refer particularly to the friends of the dialogue as his mockers, but to any whom he has previously counted as his friends (as at **12:4**). Nor is it to be supposed that the mockery he endures is necessarily expressed in any gross form (though cf. **30:1–15**); he takes it for granted that the company of the godly must be despising him, as he himself had no doubt in happier times despised those whom suffering had marked out in his eyes as the wicked. The weak and the stumbling he supported (4:3–4), indeed, but as one of the wise he must have shared the common belief in that very retributive justice from whose operation he is now—in the eyes of others—smarting.

C. (:3) Entreaty for Divine Support

*“Lay down, now, a pledge for me with Thyself;
Who is there that will be my guarantor?”*

John Hartley: Job’s words are similar to the psalmist’s: *“I have done justice and righteousness; do not surrender me to my oppressors. Be surety for your servant for good; let not the arrogant oppress me”* (**Ps. 119:121–22**). This parallel passage makes it clear that Job is now pleading to God for immediate relief from his suffering while he has to wait for the heavenly court to hear his case. This plea offers evidence that Job’s faith in God remains firm and that God is the witness spoken of in **16:19**.

D. (:4) Effects of Divine Blinding on Job’s Mockers – No Exaltation

*“For Thou hast kept their heart from understanding;
Therefore Thou wilt not exalt them.”*

E. (:5) Expectation of Retribution against Traitorous Friends

*“He who informs against friends for a share of the spoil,
The eyes of his children also shall languish.”*

John Hartley: Speaking to the friends, Job warns them of the danger that their false accusations against him may incur with a proverb about the retribution exacted against the children of him who informs against a friend for personal gain.

Elmer Smick: **Verse 5** is a proverb. Job is reminding his counselors of the dire consequences of slander.

V. (17:6-10) CONDITION OF HOPELESSNESS AS LIFE SLIPS AWAY – “I AM FADING AWAY AS I MAINTAIN MY INNOCENCE”

A. (:6) Object of Ridicule and Repulsion

*“But He has made me a byword of the people,
And I am one at whom men spit.”*

John Hartley: Job now mourns how deeply God has humiliated him among men. He has become a byword to the whole community. When passersby behold his deteriorated condition, they are filled with such repulsion that they shout reproaches and spit in his face, a revolting, insulting gesture. Undeserved mockery is a serious offense, for it darkens people's minds, preventing them from discerning the truth.

B. (:7) Body of Rapid Physical Deterioration

*“My eye has also grown dim because of grief,
And all my members are as a shadow.”*

Trevor Longman: No wonder Job is despondent. He is filled with grief and physically fades away, like a shadow (v. 7).

C. (:8-10) Persistent Claim of Innocence in the Face of Unjustified Attacks

*“The upright shall be appalled at this,
And the innocent shall stir up himself against the godless.
Nevertheless the righteous shall hold to his way,
And he who has clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger.
But come again all of you now,
For I do not find a wise man among you.”*

John Hartley: vs. 8 -- Job deplores the attitude that his woes produce in his friends. To disclose the inappropriateness of the friends' approach to him, Job describes the response to ill-fate that is expected from a truly upright (*yāšār*) or innocent (*nāqī*) man. An upright person is so appalled at the abuse borne by an innocent victim that he, also an innocent person, stirs himself to oppose this kind of behavior from the godless. He defends the innocent and condemns the guilty. But Job's friends have not followed this standard of conduct. Instead they have sided with the scoffers and added to his suffering.

Francis Andersen: Job is outraged because he, the man after God's own heart, has made matters worse for himself by maintaining his own integrity. He has laid himself open to the charge of hypocrisy on top of secret sin. As a person now obviously deserted by God, he is unprotected prey for any hunter. Cf. **chapter 30**. And worse, while people with base minds may make him a target of popular obloquy, with no fear of divine retribution, for such a damned soul has no longer any claim on the protection of God, those who are on God's side may feel that they are helping God in his work by treating Job as a miscreant. So Job is forced to defy them all (**10a**), as devoid of wisdom, even if everyone else admires them as sound men.

What can Job do? Nothing, except cling to his belief in the rightness of his cause, of which he is more convinced than ever (**9**). There is hardly a place in the book of Job concerning which commentators are in wider disagreement than this statement.

Delitzsch (I, p. 300) compares it with a rocket burst of light. Others find the thought quite out of place, and either transfer it to another position, or leave it out altogether.

We see no need for this, although the difficulties are acknowledged, and dogmatism either way is no solution.

David Guzik: vs. 9 -- *Yet the righteous will hold to his way*: **F.B. Meyer** gave several reasons why this was so.

- “You shall hold on your way because Jesus holds you in his strong hand. He is your Shepherd; He has vanquished all your foes, and you shall never perish.”
- “You shall hold on your way because the Father has designed through you to glorify His Son; and there must be no gaps in his crown where jewels ought to be.”
- “You shall hold on your way because the Holy Spirit has designed to make you his residence and home; and He is within you the perennial spring of a holy life.”

Elmer Smick: vs. 10 -- Job is outraged at his friends’ attitude, which he considers completely devoid of wisdom. He taunts them to come back and have another go at him. The verse lends added weight to the interpretation of **vv.8–9** as sarcasm.

Tremper Longman: vv. 10-11 -- In **v. 10** Job clearly addresses the three friends and taunts them to come back and do their best against him. He knows, however, the outcome based on their past performance. He will not find a bona fide sage among them. None of them will be able to diagnose or provide a remedy for his condition. They are supposed to be doctors of the soul, but they continue to fail miserably. Because of their failure, Job feels defeated. He has no “plans” for the future because he sees no way out of his predicament. He lacks desire because he has no hope.

VI. (17:11-16) CRISIS OF HOPE – “IT LOOKS LIKE MY ONLY RELIEF WILL BE FOUND IN SHEOL”

Elmer Smick: The counselors have said that night will be turned to day for Job if only he would get right with God (cf. **11:17**). In **vv.12–16** Job makes a parody of their advice. It is like going to the grave with the notion that all you have to do is treat it like home where warmth and loved ones are and it will become so. No, Job’s fondest desires have been shattered (**v.11**); he has no hope but death. He closes this section as he opened it, with the despair of the grave (**16:22–17:2**). This despair is not quite as reprehensible as is their faulty advice.

Meredith Kline: vv. 10-16 – Job’s changes in mood are abrupt and extreme. Disdainfully inviting the wisdomless wise men to renew their witless counsel (**v. 10**), Job concludes with a description of his pathetic plight – on the brink of community with the worms.

A. (:11) Calling it Quits

*“My days are past,
my plans are torn apart,*

Even the wishes of my heart.”

John Hartley: He deplores the swift passing of his days, for suffering preempts them of any meaning. His plans (*zimmâ*) are undone. And the desires of my heart, namely, to be respected and accomplish good for others, are turned to ashes. With these thoughts Job’s hope sinks to a low ebb.

B. (:12) Condemning False Hope When Reality is Darkness

*“They make night into day, saying,
'The light is near,' in the presence of darkness.”*

Elmer Smick: The counselors had said that night would be turned to day for Job if only he would get right with God (cf. **Job 11:17**). In **Job 17:12-16** Job made a parody of their advice. It was like going to the grave with the notion that all you have to do is treat it like home where warmth and loved ones are and it will become so.

C. (:13-16) Considering Sheol to Be the Destiny that Extinguishes All Hope

*“If I look for Sheol as my home,
I make my bed in the darkness;
14 If I call to the pit, 'You are my father';
To the worm, 'my mother and my sister';
15 Where now is my hope?
And who regards my hope?
16 Will it go down with me to Sheol?
Shall we together go down into the dust?”*

Tremper Longman: vv. 13-14 – The best interpretation of is as an acknowledgment of what is essentially a **death wish**. The “vv. 13–14 pit” is the grave, and maggots (and elsewhere, worms) are associated with the grave and death and putrefaction. If his hope is for death, then where is his hope? It is in the grave. Death is not something distant and impersonal; it is the place where he can find refuge (“*my house*”) and rest (“*my bed*”). He wants it close to him like he would want his closest and dearest relatives (father [pit], mother, sister [maggots]). But no one can see his hope unless they take the journey to Sheol with him.

David Clines: As in his previous speeches, it is death that is the closing note (**7:21b; 10:21–22; 14:20–22**). But that is not because he is suffering so badly that he believes he must soon die, nor because he has been unable to gain the support he had a right to expect from his friends, but because there is no sign of the vindication he demands, no hint that his judicial appeal to God (**13:20–22**) has penetrated the court of heaven. It is the perpetual ignoring of his right that has worn him down, crushed his spirit (**v 1**), wasted his limbs (**v 7**), broken his hopes (**v 11**).

Derek Kidner: Job’s speech ends, as we have noted earlier, in a despairing account of his distress. He is without a friend, the marks of death are visible in his bodily appearance and his life is ebbing away (**17:5-16**). Having raised himself to such

heights in his cry for a witness in heaven, he quickly descends to the depths again as his present circumstances get the better of him. . . The only relief he can expect from his pain is the community of maggots! His only recourse is to prepare himself for a home *in the grave* (17:13; Hebrew, *Sheol*). And there in death his hope dies with him: “*Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?*” (17:16). This is utter despondency. If he is to be vindicated, God must act now before it is too late and he is claimed by the forces of darkness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you understand that your words have the power either to tear down or to life up others who are suffering?
- 2) How does God’s sovereignty help you to deal with suffering in your life?
- 3) Why is vindication so important to Job?
- 4) How depressed does someone have to be to feel that they are better off dead?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Clines: The **tonality** of the speech resembles that of Job’s previous speech in **chaps. 12–14**. There is the same combination of sarcasm directed to the friends at the opening (16:2–5), though less pugnacious, less intellectualist, and the same hopeless conviction of the imminence of death at the close (17:11–16). The middle of the speech exhibits a self-pitying expression of exhaustion (16:7), dryness (16:8), weeping (16:16), extinction of the life-force (17:1), destruction of hope (17:11). The “laments” that protest at God’s ferocious behavior display, strangely enough, a sense of keen vitality on Job’s part; it is as though when he considers himself in his suffering his spirit droops, but when he considers how his suffering has come about and what it proves about the God who has caused it his anger rouses him to fresh *élan*. Distinctive in this speech are: the defiant cry to Earth that his death should not go unavenged (16:18), a cry of great potency that shows Job’s mood is far from a settled depressiveness; and the stolid conviction, emphatically prefaced (“*even now behold,*”), that his plea is firmly entrenched in heaven. Unlike **chaps. 12–14** the subject matter of the speech is persistently Job himself and never the suffering of humanity in general; there is nothing elegiac here, but rather an overflowing of the language of intensity.

John Hartley: In this speech Job vents the agony of his ignominy among men and his estrangement from God. As his pains wear him down, his desire for vindication grows stronger. Presently God seems to be an architect of the cruelest suffering, a tyrant inattentive to his pleas. Like a mighty general leading his army against a well-fortified

city, God marshals the forces of affliction against Job. By emaciating his body God has made Job a witness against himself. Socially too God has increased his suffering by blinding the friends from discerning matters accurately, and so he has turned them into mockers. They have become inflictors of suffering rather than sharers in his sorrow, easing its sting.

In a step of daring faith, Job declares that he has a witness in heaven, a defender who will someday verify his claim to innocence. He requests that his defender not only settle his case favorably by attesting his innocence, but also that he serve as his guarantor so that he may be freed from his illness in the immediate future. Only a reprieve will grant the time necessary for the resolution of his case in normal procedure. If God should attend to any of his words, the error in the friends' argument would become plain to all. But Job's ray of hope flickers before the lengthening shadows of death. Therefore, it is urgent that this heavenly witness come to his aid before death claims him as its victim. Since his hope cannot outlive him and bring about a change of his reputation after he has gone, Job bitterly laments the fate before him, seeking to move God to act on his behalf before it is too late.

Tremper Longman: Thus in typical fashion begins Job's fourth speech in response to his friends' arguments. Job begins with an insult (16:2–6), which has become pretty standard in these speeches and points to the wisdom dispute being at the heart of the book. The three friends came as comforters, but to Job's mind, far from offering comfort they have been troublesome with their "*windy words*" (16:3). Job then launches into God and accuses him of being unfair (16:7–9; see the earlier accusation at 9:22–24; 10:1–22; 13:17–28), since it is God who has attacked him (16:10–18; see also 6:1–7; 7:11–16). Such thoughts make him wish for some type of arbitrator between himself and God (16:19–22). He briefly entertained such a hope in 9:32–35 before concluding that no such "umpire" was available, but here he grows in confidence that such might be the case (and see further 19:23–27).

Job's speech continues in **chap. 17**, where he begins by expressing his depression. He is at death's door, and those around him are mocking him (17:1–2). He next derides his "*friends*" for selling him out (vv. 3–5). But then again, God has "set him up," thus deepening his depression (vv. 6–7). He proceeds to generalize from his own experience and says that though the virtuous are depressed from this type of treatment, they remain virtuous (vv. 8–9). Job has no hope in this life; his only hope is death (vv. 10–16).

Charles Swindoll: What, specifically, brought Job to this point of depression? I believe it's best expressed in the Latin words, *Deus absconditus*. I came across those words this week. . . *Deus* is the Latin word for God. *Absconditus* gives us our English word abscond. **Webster** says it means "to conceal, to depart secretly and hide oneself." God has secretly split the scene. That's it, exactly!

"He's gone. I can't figure Him out. When I pray I don't get answers. When I devote myself even more deeply to doing His will for all the right reasons, I continue to lose.

When I pray, zip happens. God has absconded with the blessings.” C. S. Lewis describes the frustration perfectly in A Grief Observed.

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him. . . you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become.

Deus absconditus. That expresses the problem without any literary ruffles or lace. He’s hit bottom.

**Disgusted,
Distressed,
Depressed,
Despondent.**

The man has reached absolute rock bottom. Death seems his only recourse, the one refuge of relief. Right now, the grave seems mighty inviting.

TEXT: Job 18:1-21

TITLE: *BILDAD'S SECOND SPEECH – WHAT THE WICKED SHOULD DREAD!*

BIG IDEA:

THE DESTINY OF THE WICKED CANNOT BE THE DESTINY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: The strophes may be outlined thus:

2–4	(3 lines)	address to Job
5–7	(3 lines)	the end of the wicked
8–10	(3 lines)	he is trapped
11–14	(4 lines)	he is brought to the underworld
15–17	(3 lines)	on earth memory of him perishes
18–21	(4 lines)	his story recapitulated; appraisals

John Hartley: Bildad takes up the task of instructing Job for the second time. His speech is developed quite simply in two sections: a complaint against Job (vv. 2–4), and a discourse on the terrible fate of the wicked (vv. 5–21). Obviously provoked by Job's words and his manner, Bildad delivers a passionate oration on the terrors that await the evildoer. Whereas in his former speech he emphasized the possibility that Job might have a bright future, because the righteous are blessed, he now details the horrid fate that befalls the ungodly. He paints a bleak picture without a single bright stroke. He offers Job no hope, for he wants to persuade him that his questioning God is wrong and will have dire consequences.

Tremper Longman: Bildad's speech implies that the life of wicked people can seem good on the surface. However, there are all kinds of dangers that lurk below the surface and will ultimately catch up with them. Right now their life may be well lit (vv. 5–6), but that light will ultimately be extinguished. In the present they may have strength, but ultimately they will become cramped and weakened (vv. 7, 13). Their life journey may seem unencumbered now, but there are traps, nooses, and ropes ready to grab them away. Furthermore, no one will remember them. There are no offspring to preserve their memory.

Derek Kidner: Bildad has expressed his verdict and passed his judgement: Job is wicked and is even now paying the consequences. Bildad has espoused once again his view of immediate retribution: that the wicked suffer for their crimes against God and humanity here and now. It is simplistic and naïve. One wonders if Bildad had ever seen what he was recounting. The wicked are not forgotten: we still talk of Sodom and Gomorrah to this day! Bildad's worldview is the stuff of fantasy. He was shaken by Job. It wasn't only what Job had said that unnerved him; it was the nagging thought that he knew that Job was a righteous man.

Bildad appears so to overplay his hand that one suspects he is arguing from desperation rather than conviction. Everything Job stands for is an affront to his theological system. He is clearly shaken by it. And his only defence is to entrench himself in a view that, one suspects, even he does not fully believe in any more. No one in his right mind would argue the way Bildad does, and one gets the impression that here is a man more intent on keeping his own convictions intact than on offering genuine help and understanding to a friend in desperate need. Sometimes we have to be prepared to admit that we are wrong. At the very least we should have the courage to admit that we just may be mistaken.

(:1) PROLOGUE

“Then Bildad the Shuhite responded,”

I. (:2-4) COMPLAINT AGAINST JOB

A. (:2) Your Words Escalate the Conflict

*“How long will you hunt for words?
Show understanding and then we can talk.”*

John Hartley: Annoyed and insulted by Job’s words, Bildad asks Job how long it will be before he quits speaking. This question is a stiff rebuke, for a wise man was known for controlling his rhetoric and for his ability to address each situation with precise language. Thus Bildad feels that Job’s verbosity reveals his guilt. Also, in his opinion Job is complicating his plight by his much speaking. Therefore, he enjoins Job to be sensible, i.e., to display some basic wisdom, in order that his friends can speak to him.

David Clines: Job had begun his last speech with a complaint against the inefficacy of words, and had called for an end to “windy words” without substance (**16:3**). Bildad on the contrary has much to fear from words; for Job’s words threaten to upset his notions of **universal order**. His is a more nervous response than Eliphaz’s, who had merely reprimanded Job for unprofessional behavior, that is. uttering “*tempestuous*” words unbecoming to a sage (**15:2**).

B. (:3) Your Lack of Respect Demeans Us

*“Why are we regarded as beasts,
As stupid in your eyes?”*

John Hartley: Bildad reproaches Job specifically for speaking down to the friends. Job’s attitude makes Bildad feel that he and his companions are being regarded as cattle, very dumb (cf. **Ps. 73:22**). Thus he rejects Job’s assertion that if their places were reversed he could compose speeches as good as those of his friends, but that his words would offer more comfort (**Job 16:4–5**). And he is unnerved by Job’s statement that he cannot find a wise man among the friends (**17:10**).

Francis Andersen: Bildad is more concerned for his own reputation than for meeting Job's need. Of course, Job has asked for this with his derogatory remarks (e.g. **12:2; 17:10**). But Bildad continues to do what Job has rightly complained about; he kicks a man when he is down (**6:14, 21; 12:4; 13:4; 16:2**).

Albert Barnes: the general idea is, that Job had not treated their views with the attention which they deserved, but had regarded them as unworthy of notice.

C. (:4) Your Inflated View of Your Self-Importance Causes You to Angrily Hurt Yourself

*“O you who tear yourself in your anger—
For your sake is the earth to be abandoned,
Or the rock to be moved from its place?”*

John Hartley: He judges that much of Job's agony comes from his chafing against God's discipline. Such resistance is futile and only creates greater discomfort for the one afflicted. Bildad is countering Job's complaint that “[God] has torn me in his wrath and hated me” (**16:9**). The truth is that it is Job, not God, who is the mad, raving animal.

Bildad then asks Job if for his own benefit he actually expects God either to cause the world to be forsaken or to move a boulder from its place. A forsaken land is a territory that has been devastated either by enemy troops or by a natural catastrophe. A boulder moved from its place suggests an earthquake (**14:18**). With this question Bildad takes up Job's words in **14:18** about **God's power** that both changes the landscape and destroys a person's hope (cf. also **9:5–6**). For Bildad the moral order is so integrally related to the natural order that asking for a change in the moral law—Job asking God to acquit him without his repenting—is the same as asking for a remarkable event in nature. But it is beyond his imagination that God would so alter the universe to redeem one man. Bildad thus believes that Job's line of reasoning brings him to the brink of arrogant insanity.

David Clines: If the retributive order of the moral universe is abandoned, as Job demands it should be for his sake, the **cosmic order of stability** goes with it. It is not that there is a mere analogy between the cosmic order and the moral order; it is rather that the moral principle of retribution is an organic part of the world order. Job's assault on retribution for his own sake, i.e., so that his claim to innocence may be sustained, is an assault on cosmos and an invitation for chaos to invade. Without a justice guaranteed by heaven the foundations of the earth tremble (**Alonso Schökel**, quoting **Ps 82:5**; cf. **11:3**).

Francis Andersen: A speaker who has run out of ideas can always resort to satire. No pastor mocks a sufferer by throwing his own words back at him. Yet this is what Bildad does. In **16:9** Job had identified God as his torturer, tearing him to pieces. Bildad replies that it is Job (assuming, with most interpreters, that the words are vocative) who is tearing himself to pieces by his needless rage. In **14:18**, Job spoke plaintively of the

erosion of the most solid cliff. Bildad jibes, ‘*Do you want the whole universe to be reconstructed to suit you?*’

Elmer Smick: He resents Job’s attitude toward them as belittling and accuses Job of being irrationally self-centered. The world is going to remain the same no matter how much Job rants against the order of things (v.4; for the second colon compare the image found at **14:18**).

Albert Barnes: A reproof of his **pride** and **arrogance**. “Shall everything be made to give way for you? Are you the only man in the world and of so much importance, that the earth is to be made vacant for you to dwell in? Are the interests of all others to be sacrificed for you, and is everything else to give place for you? Are all the laws of God’s government to be made to yield rather than that you should be punished?”

II. (:5-21) TERRIBLE FATE OF THE WICKED

Francis Andersen: According to Bildad, the moral order, which Job is overturning, is as fixed as the earth and the hills. The fate of the wicked equally follows a strict law. Bildad recites a long poem about the troubles that overtake evil men. There is a touch of extravagance; what the argument lacks in substance it makes up for with rhetoric. It is also ironical that in the end Job will rediscover God’s justice by contemplating his works in nature. Here a bunch of incongruous images is assembled in five or six distinct poems: darkness (**verses 5ff.**), hunting (**8ff.**), illness (**11ff.**), brigandage (**14**), drought (**16**), childlessness (**17ff.**).

Warren Wiersbe: In this address [on the **Terrors of Death**], Bildad painted four vivid pictures of the death of the wicked.

- A light put out (:5-6). Light is associated with life just as darkness is associated with death. . . The picture here is that of a lamp hanging in a tent and a fire smoldering in a fire pot.
- A traveler trapped (:7-10). Bildad used six different words to describe the dangers people face when they try to run away from death:
 - o a net – spread across the path to catch him
 - o a snare – branches covering a deep pit
 - o a trap – a “gin” (snare) with a noose that springs when touched; he is caught by the heel
 - o a robber – another pitfall
 - o a snare – a noose hidden on the ground
 - o a trap – any device that catches prey.No matter what schemes the traveler invents, he cannot escape the traps; and the more he tries, the weaker he becomes (18:7). Darkness and danger surround him, and there is no hope.
- A criminal pursued (:11-15). Terror frightens him, calamity eats away at his strength, and disaster waits for him to fall (**vv. 11-12**, NJV). . .

The frightened criminal gets weaker and weaker but still tries to keep going. If he goes back to his tent to hide, the pursuers find him, arrest him, drag him out, and take him to the king of terrors. They take everything out of his tent, burn the tent, and then scatter sulfur over the ashes. The end of that man is fire and brimstone!

- A tree rooted up (:16-21). Sometimes death is not as dramatic and sudden as the arresting of a criminal. Death may be gradual, like the dying of a tree. The roots dry up, the branches start to wither, and the dead branches are cut off one by one. Soon the tree is completely dead, and men chop it down.

A. (:5-7) Degeneration

1. (:5-6) Degeneration from Light and Life to Darkness and Death

*“Indeed, the light of the wicked goes out,
And the flame of his fire gives no light.
6 The light in his tent is darkened,
And his lamp goes out above him.”*

John Hartley: Taking issue with Job’s questioning of God’s just rule, Bildad affirms that retribution against the wicked is operative in the present. He defends this truth by quoting two proverbs. The first one (**v. 5**) presents a general truth, as indicated by the use of plural forms. It says *the light of the wicked is extinguished*. This proverb is similar to **Prov. 13:9**: *“The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out”* (cf. **Prov. 20:20; 24:20**). Even though the wicked may be able to kindle a brilliant fame (*šebîḥ ’ēš*), it will not continue to burn before the strong winds of God’s judgment.

The second proverb speaks about a sheikh’s lamp (**v. 6**). The light inside the sheikh’s tent, his most private abode, grows dark. When this lamp is lit, it signifies that all is well in the chief’s household. But now the very lamp that hangs above his head is extinguished. Darkness totally enshrouds his tent. The doctrine of retribution is often illustrated by the metaphors of light and darkness. **Light** is symbolic of life (**3:20**), wealth (**22:28**), and happiness; conversely, **darkness** represents loss (**15:30**), sadness, and death (**3:5**). This proverb means that the fate that befalls a wicked person darkens every corner of his life. He cannot see any ray of hope penetrating this darkness. Perhaps by shifting from the plural forms in **v. 5** to the singular forms in **v. 6** Bildad is making an application indirectly, subtly, to Job.

2. (:7) Degeneration from Vigor to Constraint

*“His vigorous stride is shortened,
And his own scheme brings him down.”*

John Hartley: Bildad pictures a wicked person’s life as a journey that is unexpectedly halted. Each traveler takes strides appropriate to the path he treads (cf. **Prov. 4:10–27**). The one who starts down the path of evil begins with long, vigorous strides. His strides are lengthened by great successes: the greater each success, the longer his strides become. Because his way is easy, the wicked person at first appears to be making swift

progress. But soon his vigor wanes, his stride is shortened (*ṣārar*). He trips over his own grandiose plans, stumbles, and falls. This picture teaches that no wicked person can enjoy prosperity for a great length of time. Neither his strength nor his subtle planning will sustain him indefinitely.

David Clines: The image is primarily of decay and an ultimate laying low, like the image of the extinguishing of lamp and fire in vv 5–6.

Tremper Longman: We should note that v. 7b attributes their failure to their own advice. They hurt themselves, in other words. Their own advice leads to all kinds of threats as they walk the path of life.

B. (:8-10) Detention – Snared in a Variety of Traps

*“For he is thrown into the net by his own feet,
And he steps on the webbing.
9 A snare seizes him by the heel,
And a trap snaps shut on him.
10 A noose for him is hidden in the ground,
And a trap for him on the path.”*

Albert Barnes: vs. 8 -- He is caught in his own tricks, as if he had spread a net or dug a pitfall for another, and had fallen into it himself. The meaning is, that he would bring ruin upon himself while he was plotting the ruin of others; see **Psalms 9:16**, “*The wicked is snared by the work of his own hands;*”. . . The phrase “*by his own feet*” here means, that he walks there himself. He is not led or driven by others, but he goes himself into the net. Wild animals are sometimes driven, but he walks along of his own accord into the net, and has no one to blame but himself.

John Hartley: Bildad illustrates the fact that a wicked person is sure to stumble on the path he is taking by enumerating the many traps that are set to ensnare him. He uses six different words for trapping devices. Such a person’s path is dotted with many traps, like a present-day minefield. While a wicked person is traveling on his road to success, his head raised proudly, his foot will unsuspectingly trip a hidden snare, and he will be caught. A clever person may escape one or more snares, but his path is so lined with traps that it is inevitable that he will trigger one of them. It is impossible for any wicked person to escape the heavenly trapper.

David Clines: The whole issue in this topos is that the wicked is set on a **collision course with death**; it is not that he is taken in the snares he has set for others (**Fohrer, Habel**), nor that he and not God is the cause of his own downfall (**Terrien**), nor that “the world is full of traps to catch the feet that stray from the right path” (Peake), but rather that “all things hasten on his ruin; the moral order of the world is such that wherever he moves or touches upon it it becomes a snare to seize him” (**Davidson**). The imagery is drawn not from the heroic hunting of big game, like lions and wild oxen, such as is depicted in Mesopotamia and Egypt, but from the devices used by ordinary people for the **snaring of game**, especially birds.

C. (:11-14) Dread

*“All around terrors frighten him,
And harry him at every step.
12 His strength is famished,
And calamity is ready at his side.
13 His skin is devoured by disease,
The first-born of death devours his limbs.
14 He is torn from the security of his tent,
And they march him before the king of terrors.”*

David Clines: vs. 12 -- Calamity and disaster are perhaps pictured as two of the “terrors” that surround the wicked man; just like the terrors that actively affrighted and harried him in v 11, they are represented as wild animals that actively hunger to take him in their maw, or alternatively wait only for the moment when they can overcome him with least resistance, the moment when he stumbles.

Vs. 13 -- This is more a picture of **death** than of illness. It is not a matter of “Death’s First-Born gnaw[ing] his limbs” (**JB**) or “eat[ing] away parts of his skin” (NIV), but of the total devastation wreaked upon the body of the wicked by death. The focus is not a gradual process of decaying disease (e.g., “*eats away*”) but on the **overwhelming result** (“*consumes*”). Not all wicked people die of lingering illnesses, of course, and Bildad does not want to maintain they do; whatever the specific cause, the result is the same; the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out (v 5).

Vs. 14 -- The “*tent*” has a multiple metaphoric significance: it is the man’s **shelter**, if not exactly his castle, where he has a right to feel secure; it is his own **property**, where he has a right to invite his own guests (cf. 11:14) and turn away unwelcome visitors like these emissaries of Death; it is the symbol of his well-being and of the security of his existence. (It is not here a symbol of his body from which he is wrested, as against **Andersen**.) The tent is the **security**.

Albert Barnes: vs. 13 -- The “*first-born*” is usually spoken of as distinguished for vigor and strength; **Genesis 49:3**, “*Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength;*” and the idea conveyed here by the “*first-born of death*” is the most fearful and destructive disease that death has ever engendered; compare **Milton**’s description of the progeny of sin, in Paradise Los. Diseases are called “the sons or children of death” by the Arabs, (see **Schultens** in loc.,) as being begotten by it.

Vs. 14 -- **Death is a fearful monarch.** All dread him. He presides in regions of chilliness and gloom. All fear to enter those dark regions where he dwells and reigns, and an involuntary shudder seizes the soul on approaching the confines of his kingdom. Yet all must be brought there; and though man dreads the interview with that fearful king, there is no release. The monarch reigns from age to age - reigns over all. There is but one way in which he will cease to appear as a terrific king. - It is by confidence in Him who came to destroy death; that great Redeemer who has taken away his “sting,”

and who can enable man to look with calmness and peace even on the chilly regions where he reigns. The idea here is not precisely that of the Roman and Grecian mythologists, of a terrific king, like Rhadamanthus, presiding over the regions of the dead but it is of death personified - of death represented as a king fitted to inspire awe and terror.

John Hartley: vs. 14 -- The wicked man is torn from his **secure tent**. His tent had been the center of his security. There he felt safe from any harm. But he is forcefully removed from his dwelling place and marched off to the king of terrors, the prince of the dead.¹³ Such a monarch was believed to reign over the subterranean region that housed the souls of the dead and the demons of plague and terror.

D. (:15-17) Desolation

*“There dwells in his tent nothing of his;
Brimstone is scattered on his habitation.
16 His roots are dried below,
And his branch is cut off above.
17 Memory of him perishes from the earth,
And he has no name abroad.”*

Albert Barnes: vs. 15 – “Brimstone” -- The only thing necessarily implied in the language before us is, that sulphur, the emblem of desolation, would be scattered on his dwelling, and that his dwelling would be wholly **desolate**.

John Hartley: vs. 17 -- The **memory** of the wicked person vanishes from the earth. The memory of a person perpetuates his existence on earth after death. Therefore, to leave behind a good reputation is a blessing. As **Prov. 10:7** says: “*The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.*” A blessed memory was the prize of the righteous. It spread abroad even after their death. But the wicked has no name in the land after his death. The removal of this person’s name means he is completely forgotten, making the judgment against him full.

Francis Andersen: Bildad has listed the things most dreaded by an Israelite in life and in death as the tokens of rejection by God. Such events distinguish the godless from the good, and serve as warnings to the rest (**verse 20**).

E. (:18-21) Death and Extinction

*“He is driven from light into darkness,
And chased from the inhabited world.
19 He has no offspring or posterity among his people,
Nor any survivor where he sojourned.
20 Those in the west are appalled at his fate,
And those in the east are seized with horror.
21 Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked,
And this is the place of him who does not know God.”*

John Hartley: vs. 21 -- Bildad closes with a summary statement, marked off by the particle *'ak*, “surely.” An evil man, i.e., a person who knew not God, will be imprisoned in a dreadful dwelling. “*Not to know God*” means to have no fellowship with God, either because a person has willfully broken his relationship with God or because he has refused to enter into covenant with God. In death that person will never again experience God’s enriching grace, for his abode will be in a chaotic place devoid of light. Sadly there is no escape from his punishment.

Tremper Longman: Verse 20, however, suggests that a type of remembrance will persist, but not the type that anyone would ever desire. Everywhere (west and east) will be horrified by their fate. But, as Bildad concludes in **v. 21**, that is exactly what one expects from the guilty, from those who do not know God.

Albert Barnes: The conclusion or sum of the whole matter. The meaning is, that the habitations of all that knew not God would be desolate - a declaration which Job could not but regard as aimed at himself; compare **Job 20:29**. This is the close of this harsh and severe speech. It is no wonder that Job should feel it keenly, and that he “did” feel it is apparent from the following chapter. A string of proverbs has been presented, having the appearance of proof, and as the result of the long observation of the course of events, evidently bearing on his circumstances, and so much in point that he could not well deny their pertinency to his condition. He was stung to the quick, and gave vent to his agonized feelings in the following chapter.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What happens when you rigidly try to apply one biblical principle (**you will reap what you sow**) without taking into consideration the complexity of God’s providential dealings?
- 2) What in **Job’s circumstances** matches the doomsday details of Bildad’s characterization of the fate of the wicked?
- 3) Why is Bildad unable to process the **tension** between Job’s sufferings and his claim to innocence?
- 4) Why don’t the wicked receive the **full consequences** of their evil actions in this life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: Bildad vividly portrays for Job the terrible fate of the wicked. The bright light that shines in his dwelling is extinguished, forcing him to live in darkness. Using another metaphor, Bildad enumerates the many kinds of snares that are concealed on

the way that the wicked person travels. He wants to inform Job that no evildoer can escape being caught in one of God's traps. The person who is caught is terror-stricken. Usually he discovers that he is trapped when he falls to a dreaded illness. His last days are filled with pain and fear. Then at his death no memorial is erected for him on earth. Neither does God leave him any survivors. Even his name vanishes from the earth. His bitter fate appalls all.

It is evident that Bildad thinks that Job has traveled a long way down this path, for he is tormented by apprehensive fears and all his offspring have died. But he is also warning Job that although his pain is now great, the path on which he is traveling will result in a more horrible fate. Perhaps he wishes to stir in Job strong emotions of repulsion at such a fate in order that Job might forsake his claims to innocence and humbly repent. But Bildad does not explicitly extend to Job an invitation to repentance. Possibly he believes that Job's fate is irreversible. Therefore, he considers it his task solely to instruct Job about the certain, miserable destiny of all who do not know God. The sight of Job's emaciated body has fired Bildad's rhetoric, but at the expense of his showing any compassion that would encourage him to find God.

David Clines: The primary interpretive question for this speech is whether Bildad casts Job as one of the wicked, who will inevitably suffer the fate here portrayed, or whether the picture here drawn is of what precisely Job is not. **R. E. Murphy**, typically for many commentators, simply writes: "The implication, of course, is that Job is the wicked person" (Wisdom Literature, 32). He allows that "the tenor is not unlike Bildad's earlier speech (cf. 8:8–19)," but continues, "but now judgment has been passed on Job" (my italics). **Gray** too believed that the particular application of Bildad's words are suggested plainly enough: "Job is not prosperous, Job is wicked" (158; similarly **Hesse**). For **Habel** too, "the mood of Bildad has changed from being positive but defensive to being negative and condemnatory . . . his portrayal of the wicked is an unconditional announcement of the fate Job can expect" (282–83). **Davidson** had put it well, as usual: "Every sentence of Bildad's speech carries with it the charge, Thou art the man."

The interpretation here offered is different. It is that Bildad has perceived in Job's claim for his innocence to be recognized—despite the evident signs of his guilt—an affront to the stable moral order in which he has always found his own security. He needs for his own sake as well as Job's to reiterate that "the laws of the universe remain unshaken, and retribution will ultimately overtake the evildoer" (**Gordis**, 187). He does not mean to imply that Job is himself the man here depicted, though he would not be embarrassed to admit that there are certainly similarities. His principal aim, already established in his first speech, is to encourage Job to "seek" God with a "pure and upright" life; he cannot now be coolly informing Job that it is too late for any of that. The few words that Job has spoken, unwise and hostile against heaven though they may have been, cannot outweigh the simple fact that **Job is still alive**; and that for Bildad is the difference between a rescuable sinner and a doomed one (cf. on 8:4–6). . .

There are some lines that seem all too painfully applicable to Job's present state (**vv 11, 13, 15b, 19** especially), but there is no reason for Job to believe that he is locked into this fate. Those readers who think Bildad is describing Job and those who think he portrays the opposite to Job are both wrong: what he sets forth is an **avoidable possibility**. . .

Bildad needs a **dogma of exact retribution** and of black-and-white morality because order is fundamental for his own psychological well-being. How do I know this? By his imagery in **v 4**. He can only see in Job, a man assailed by (well-grounded) theological doubt and fighting a battle between dogma and experience, someone "*tearing himself to pieces*." That is how intellectual conflict feels to Bildad: it is mental self-abuse, deeply destructive, intuitively repugnant, and above all, wholly unnecessary. And he can only see in Job's demand for a rethinking of conventional theology a challenge to the world order that he himself finds profoundly disturbing: "Is the earth to be unpeopled on your account? are the rocks to be dislodged?" He cannot face the upheaval of thought Job invites him to any more than he can contemplate the depopulation brought about by a war or the convulsion of an earthquake. Now we all know what is wrong with people who cannot with equanimity say to mountains, "*Get up and throw yourself into the sea*" (**Matt 21:21 JB**). Faith and the need for order do not make good room-mates. Bildad is a man of dogma, not of faith, and he will run no risks. He mistrusts even himself. He is "yesterday's child, and knows nothing" (**8:9**).

Cyril Barber: According to Bildad, the moral order, which in Bildad's eyes, Job was attempting to overturn, was as immovable as the things God had created (i.e., the earth and the hills), and in his thinking the fate of the wicked followed similar strict laws. He then provided a long list of the troubles that overtake evil men, but he apparently was unaware of the fact that the incongruent images he used undermined his basic beliefs.

David Thompson: SOMETIMES SATAN WILL USE THOSE CLOSE TO YOU TO VERBALLY FALSELY ASSAULT YOU BY THREATENING THAT YOU ARE DOOMED AND HEADING TO JUDGMENT, AND GOD WILL HOLD THEM HIGHLY ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE FALSE THINGS THEY ARE SAYING TO YOU.

We may recall that Bildad is a Shuhite (**8:1**), which means he was a descendant of Abraham through Keturah (**Gen. 25:1-2**). He was related to Abraham and strutted around with all the pomp and aura of being a spiritual giant. He is the kind of guy who wants you to believe he is really spiritual and really knowledgeable of God and His Word, when in all reality, behind the scenes he is not spiritual and he does not know the Word and will of God.

Everything Bildad says is wrong. What he says is wrong. The way he says it is wrong and how he says it is wrong.

Why does God go to all the trouble to keep repeating these conversations? What is the point of all of this? To teach us that this goes on all the time. This is still a huge tactic of Satan. He uses people to shoot off their mouths in an attempt to get us to back away from being faithful to God and His Word.

TEXT: Job 19:1-29

TITLE: JUDGMENT IS COMING

BIG IDEA:

CERTAINTY OF FINAL VINDICATION EASES THE PAIN OF PRESENT REJECTION AND PUTS FALSE ACCUSERS IN ULTIMATE JEOPARDY

INTRODUCTION:

Francis Andersen: In this speech Job's audacious faith reaches its climax in the famous words, *I know that my Redeemer lives* (**verse 25**). He leaps to this height from a state of despair caused by the reproaches of his friends (**verses 2–6**), his devastation by God (**7–12**), and his sense of utter forsakenness (**13–22**). His **certainty of final vindication** (**23–29**) shines all the more brightly against this dark background.

Thomas Constable: This speech is one of the more important ones in the book, because in it, Job reached a **new low and a new high** in his personal experience. He revealed here the extent of his rejection by his friends, relatives, and servants, but he also came to a new confidence in God. Bildad had spoken of the terrors of death, and now Job described the trials of life—his own life. He did so by using seven figures to describe himself:

- an animal trapped (**v. 6**),
- a criminal in court (**v. 7**),
- a traveler fenced in (**v. 8**),
- a king dethroned (**v. 9**),
- a structure destroyed (**v. 10**),
- a tree uprooted (**v. 10**),
- and a city besieged (**vv. 11-12**).

This is Job's first speech since **chapter 3** in which he did not address God, though all that he said was for God's ears; his concern was more to refute his companions.

Elmer Smick: The chapter divides into four logical stanzas.

- In the first Job shows increasing irritation over his counselors' shameless attacks and his impatience with their superior claims (**vv.2–5**).
- Then follows Job's feeling of abandonment by God and perception that God's attack on him is wrong (**vv.6–12**).
- Then he blames God for alienating his kinsmen and household, even his wife (**vv.13–20**).
- In **vv.21–27** he ends this lament, to our amazement, with a triumphant expression of faith in the one who will ultimately champion his cause and vindicate him (**vv.23–27**). This stanza is bracketed by words to his friends, who Job does not believe will ever have pity (**v.21**). So he warns them of the dire consequences of their false accusations (**vv.28–29**).

John Hartley: This speech consists of five pericopes:

- a complaint against the friends (vv. 1–6);
- a complaint about God’s enmity (vv. 7–12);
- a complaint about complete alienation (vv. 13–20);
- a plea for help and a statement of assurance (vv. 21–27);
- a warning to the friends (vv. 28–29).

(:1) PROLOGUE – RESPONSE OF JOB

“Then Job responded,”

I. (:2-6) JOB’S RETORT

Definition of “retort”:

- to reply to, usually in a sharp or retaliatory way; reply in kind to.
- to return (an accusation, epithet, etc.) upon the person uttering it.
- to answer (an argument or the like) by another to the contrary.

A. (:2-3) Give Me a Break – Ease Up on Your Attacks

*“How long will you torment me,
And crush me with words?
3 These ten times you have insulted me,
You are not ashamed to wrong me.”*

Job must not have been familiar with the old adage: “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

John Hartley: Job is greatly disturbed both by the harsh tone of Bildad’s speech and by his classifying him among the wicked. Therefore, he asks Bildad and the friends how long they will continue to make him feel worse about his affliction. He complains that, in fact, their insults ridiculing his perseverance in seeking an encounter with God crush him because they make his faith in God look like obstinate rebellion against God. No wonder Job rebuffs them so sharply.

Warren Wiersbe: Our words either hurt others or heal them; we either add to their burdens or help them bear their burdens with courage. Job’s friends crushed him with their words; they made him feel worthless and helpless in the face of all his suffering. How sensitive we should be to the needs and struggles of others! Even if people do need rebuke, we should do it in love; and our words should hearten them and not weaken them.

B. (:4) My Sin is My Own Business

“Even if I have truly erred, My error lodges with me.”

Elmer Smick: Job implies his friends have no right to interfere, no right to behave as though they were God (cf. v.22).

John Hartley: Remaining confident that he has never sinned as gravely as his misfortune suggests, Job refuses to concede that he has done anything more serious than some unintentional blunder.

C. (:5-6) My Suffering Has Been Wrongly Afflicted by God

*“If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me,
And prove my disgrace to me,
Know then that God has wronged me,
And has closed His net around me.”*

Tremper Longman: However, Job insists, if Bildad and his friends demand to make a federal case (v. 5a, “if you truly make yourself powerful against me”) of this mistake (which he is not even conceding), then he intends to push back hard. He notes that they make themselves powerful against him by making his “**reproach**,” that is, his affliction and emotional suffering part of their case (“*reproof*”) against him. The way he counters is by deflecting the accusation from himself to God. He is “*perverted*” because God has perverted him (v. 6). God has motivated Job’s reaction by the way he has treated him. The next number of verses then develop the idea that God has afflicted him.

John Hartley: He is refuting his friend’s interpretation by claiming that he has not fallen prey to his own folly. The truth is that God has been the aggressive hunter who has thrown his net around his prey so that there is no possibility for him to get away.

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

II. (:7-20) JOB’S REJECTION

A. (:7-12) Rejection By God -- Complaint about God’s Angry Opposition

1. (:7) God Fails to Answer Cries for Help and Justice

*“Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer;
I shout for help, but there is no justice.”*

Francis Andersen: It is the silence of God that Job complains about, so long as there is no response to his plea for redress. To say that there is no justice does not mean that there is injustice. The verdict has not yet been given.

John Hartley: Job laments God’s treating him like an enemy. He takes this tactic in order to shock his friends into realizing that God himself is the cause of his plight, not some wrong that he has done. Languishing under God’s attack, Job cries out, *Violence!* (*hāmās*), the plaint of one in desperate need of help (**Deut. 22:23–24**). Without sufficient strength to resist his attackers, the victim’s only hope is that his cry will be

heard in some quarter or by God himself. But no one, not even God, comes to Job's rescue (cf. **Lam. 3:8**). No matter how loudly he cries, there is no justice for him.

Trapp: Nothing is more natural and usual than for men in misery to cry out for help. Job's great grief was, that neither God nor man would regard his moans or deliver him out of the net.

2. (:8) God Blocks All Possibility of Escape

*"He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass;
And He has put darkness on my paths."*

Thomas Constable: Job then named ten (cf. v. 3) hostile actions of God against himself (vv. 8-12). Note the recurrence of "He" in these verses that emphasizes **God's responsibility**.

3. (:9) God Strips away Honor

*"He has stripped my honor from me,
And removed the crown from my head."*

4. (:10) God Breaks Me Down and Uproots Hope

*"He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone;
And He has uprooted my hope like a tree."*

5. (:11-12) God Angrily Assaults Me as His Enemy

*"He has also kindled His anger against me,
And considered me as His enemy.
12 His troops come together,
And build up their way against me,
And camp around my tent."*

Tremper Longman: Verses 11–12 utilize a military metaphor to describe God's anger toward Job. He treats Job (whose name may be connected with a Hebrew word for "enemy"; see the introduction) as a "foe" (*śār*, a Hebrew word related in meaning). Thus he sends his troops against him, who lay siege to him. They build a road to march the army toward him, and then they camp all around him. One wonders whether it is appropriate to speculate who the troops are. By doing so, we may be turning a metaphor into an allegory. The idea is that God the warrior has chosen to fight against his servant Job, or at least this is Job's self-perception. Indeed, though, God has sent a "troop" against him, the accuser ("*the satan*") as we learn in the first two chapters of the book. From Job's perspective, the suffering that he experiences is the result of a whole army ranged against him, and that is the sentiment that he expresses in these two verses.

David Guzik: In **Job 19:8-12**, Job recounts the **reverse progression** of an ancient siege and conquering of a city; yet the irony was that Job was not like a mighty city, but only like a humble tent. We can see the reverse progress starting at **Job 19:8**:

- Captivity (*I cannot pass; and He has set darkness in my paths*).
- Dethronement (*taken the crown from my head*).
- Being like a wall torn down (*He breaks me down on every side*).
- Being like an uprooted tree (my hope He has uprooted like a tree).
- Having a siege set against him (*build up their road against me*).
- Being surrounded (*they encamp all around my tent*).

“Reverse this order and you have a step-by-step description of what happened in siege warfare... God’s troops laid siege as if Job were a fortified city; but, alas, he was only a tent.” (Smick)

B. (:13-20) Rejection By Family and Society – They Have All Turned against Job

Francis Andersen: Job’s burning concern for God does not make him insensitive to human relationships. On the contrary, the two are inseparable in the life of any person who attains wholeness as a human being. Job’s list of brethren, acquaintances, kinsfolk, close friends, guests, maidservants, servant(s), wife, children reveals his capacity, his enjoyment, and equally his hurt when denied the solace of company, the respect of employees, the intimacy of family.

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

1. (:13-14) Failure of Close Relatives and Friends to Help

*“He has removed my brothers far from me,
And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.
14 My relatives have failed,
And my intimate friends have forgotten me.”*

2. (:15-16) Failure of Household Servants to Help

*“Those who live in my house and my maids consider me a stranger.
I am a foreigner in their sight.
16 I call to my servant, but he does not answer,
I have to implore him with my mouth.”*

3. (:17-19) Failure of Close Relatives and Friends to Help

*“My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am loathsome to my own brothers.
18 Even young children despise me;
I rise up and they speak against me.
19 All my associates abhor me,
And those I love have turned against me.”*

Tremper Longman: In sum, Job has no one to help him. He is on his own in his suffering. The only people who seem to be physically close to him are these three friends, who feel it is their duty to tear him down. It is the three friends that he now addresses. If he expects sympathy from them, he is horribly wrong.

David Guzik: The *children* Job refers to here must be either grandchildren or those who were symbolically Job's children; it seems that all of Job's ten children were killed in a tragic accident (**Job 1:2; 1:18-19**).

4. (:20) Summary: Barely Clinging to Life

*“My bone clings to my skin and my flesh,
And I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth.”*

Tremper Longman: **Verse 20** turns from a lament over his relational alienation to his **physical suffering**. He says that he is “*skin and bones*,” barely holding on to life.

John MacArthur: The idea is that he had escaped death by a very slim margin. The loss of all his family, as well as the abuse of his friends was added to the terror of God-forsakenness which had gripped him.

III. (:21-27) JOB'S REDEEMER

Elmer Smick: Up to this point Job has come to the conclusion that he will soon die (**10:20; 16:22–17:1**). His experience has created in him a sense of amoral chaos in the world and in his life. His sense of being crushed causes him to look repeatedly toward death as a kind of hopeless release (**14:18–22; 16:11–16**). He knows he is innocent and seeks above all else to be vindicated. His compassionless counselors have reiterated their impersonal theology that declares him guilty. He feels as if God is angry with him and has become the enemy who has attacked and crushed him. He perceives that he is alone in a cruel and amoral world. There is no one left who understands, no one to plead his cause or bear witness to his innocence. And this is what he wants most of all—not release, not retribution, but only **justice, someone to vindicate him**.

A. (:21-22) Give Me a Break = Need for a Redeemer

1. (:21) Plea for Pity

*“Pity me, pity me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me.”*

Derek Kidner: It is surprising that Job calls on his friends to “*have pity on*” him at this stage (**19:21**), particularly since it is followed by as aggressive a speech against his friends as any to be found in the whole book (**19:28-29**). Job had not exactly paved the way for their pity, having implied their treachery (**6:15**), their heartlessness (**6:27**), their stupidity (**12:2-3; 13:2**), their worthlessness (**13:4**), their lies (**13:7**) and their bias

(13:7-9). They were “*miserable comforters*” (16:2) who had almost succeeded in tormenting and crushing him (19:2).

2. (:22) Perplexed by Persecution

*“Why do you persecute me as God does,
And are not satisfied with my flesh?”*

Francis Andersen: Job’s dignity and self-composure are lost. He lies broken under the blows of God and the words of men. To men he appeals for pity (verse 21), to God for justice. But both alike hound (pursue) him.

B. (:23-24) Engrave My Words = Expectation of a Redeemer

*“Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
24 That with an iron stylus and lead
They were engraved in the rock forever!”*

Tremper Longman: Verses 23–24 introduce his comments by expressing the wish that his words could become a permanent record. He wishes they were written in a scroll or, even more permanently, etched on a rock. It appears that this desire is expressed in connection with the words that follow, and by so expressing this desire, Job underlines the importance of what is to follow and thus heightens our expectations. It also may mean, as **Smick** says, that Job does not think he will last long, and so he wants his position to be recorded for posterity.

C. (:25-27) Note My Confidence in My Redeemer

1. (:25) Final Resolution

*“And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.”*

Tremper Longman: We know he wants an audience with God. He expects that he will be vindicated in such a meeting. In other words, he expects that God would move from being his accuser to being his defender once the facts are laid out on the table. Yes, this view of God is in tension with other times when he believes God is unfair and does not care whether he is innocent (9:19–21). But this is an inherent tension in Job’s mind. Sometimes he expects good things from an encounter with God and sometimes not. In this passage, we have an example of his most **optimistic thinking. He will meet God, and God will vindicate him.**

David Guzik: This is another of the brilliant flashes of faith in Job’s otherwise dark and bleak background of crisis and suffering. Perhaps as he considered that future generations would indeed look at his life and words, it stirred him to a triumphant proclamation of faith.

- The word translated Redeemer is *goel*, presenting one of the wonderful concepts of the Old Testament. “The ‘Goel’ stood for another to defend his cause, to

- “avenge wrongs done to him, and so to acquit him of all charges laid against him.” (Morgan)
- “A redeemer was a vindicator of one unjustly wronged. He was a defender of the oppressed. A champion of the suffering. An advocate of one unjustly accused. If you were ever wronged, a redeemer would come and stand beside you as your champion and advocate.” (Lawson)
- “The meaning of the word *goel* (‘redeemer’) is fundamental to understanding this passage. The word is important in Old Testament jurisprudence. It had both a criminal and a civil aspect. As ‘*blood avenger*,’ a *goel* had a responsibility to avenge the blood of a slain kinsman (Numbers 35:12-28). He was not seeking revenge but justice. On the civil side he was a redeemer or vindicator. Here he had the responsibility to ‘*buy back*’ and so redeem the lost inheritance of a deceased relative... As such he was the defender or champion of the oppressed.” (Smick)
- “When Job, amid the desolation, declared that he had a ‘*Goel*’ living and active, he was uttering a profound truth, the truth that in God, man has a Redeemer in all the fullest senses of that great word. It was a spiritual apprehension of an abiding fact, which fact came into clear shining when God was manifest in flesh.” (Morgan)
- “Christ’s kinship with his people is to be thought of with great comfort because it is voluntary. We have some, perhaps, who are akin to us, yet, who wish they were not. Many a time, when a rich man has poor relations, he is half ashamed of the kinship between them, and wishes that it did not exist. Shame upon him for thinking so! But our Lord Jesus Christ’s relationship to us is no accident of birth; it was voluntarily assumed by him.” (Spurgeon)
- “Remember, too, that it was always considered to be the duty of the *goel*, not merely to redeem by price, but where that failed, to redeem by power... There are two redemptions, — redemption by price and redemption by power, and both of these Christ hath wrought for us; — by price, by his sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary; and by power, by his Divine Spirit coming into our heart, and renewing our soul.” (Spurgeon)

2. (:26-27) Visual Encounter

*“Even after my skin is destroyed,
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes shall see and not another.
My heart faints within me.”*

Francis Andersen: there is a tremendous emphasis on ‘**seeing God**’; the point is made three times in **verses 26f**. Hitherto Job has indicated a need to hear God speaking. Sight is more immediate, more physical, harder to doubt. Cf. **42:5**. The references to skin, flesh and eyes make it clear that Job expects to have this experience as a man, not just as a disembodied shade, or in his mind’s eye. What he says should not be watered down by the biblical teaching that no-one can see God. The Old Testament records several notable instances where people such as Abraham, Moses and Isaiah ‘*saw*’ God, and Job

doubtless has something similar in mind. To underline his belief that this will happen with full possession of his personal identity, Job uses *I* three times in **verse 27a**, once on the verb, once as the emphatic pronoun subject, once as the ‘ethic dative’: AV ‘*Whom I shall see for myself*’ cannot be improved on.

Verses 25–27 are so tightly knit that there should be no doubt that **the Redeemer is God**. NEB is to be commended for securing this, and also for bringing out the forensic connotations: the ‘*vindicator*’ who ‘*will rise ... to speak in court*’ as Job’s ‘witness’ and ‘defending counsel’ is none other than ‘God himself’.

Roy Zuck: This thought so overwhelmed Job that he exclaimed, ‘*My heart yearns*’ (lit., “*my kidneys*,” considered the seat of the emotions, “*waste away*”) *within me!* He was emotionally drained by the very thought of meeting God and having Him once and for all vindicate rather than vitiate his cause.

Derek Kidner: Any interpretation of this passage has to take in view the cumulative insights of such utterances as Job gave in **14:14** and **16:19**. It has led one commentator to say that “**The hope of resurrection lies at the heart of Job’s faith.**” This is the view more commonly accepted by evangelicals: Job is speaking here of his belief that he will be vindicated **after his death** when in a bodily state – i.e., Job is expressing his belief in a **future bodily resurrection**. . . It Job’s belief that even though he must die and be consumed, he will nevertheless stand before God in a new body. He will see God as his kinsman and not as a stranger who is currently hostile towards him (**19:11-12**).

(:28-29) EPILOGUE – REVERSAL OF PUNISHMENT

A. (:28) Pursuing Unjust Opposition against Job

*“If you say, ‘How shall we persecute him?’
And ‘What pretext for a case against him can we find?’”*

B. (:29) Warning of Judgment to Come

*“Then be afraid of the sword for yourselves,
For wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
So that you may know there is judgment.”*

David Guzik: Full of spiritual confidence and faith, Job warned his friends regarding their own disbelief. They seemed to believe more in God as a system of belief rather than in a person, a person whom Job would see and who would one day vindicate him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why are Job’s friends so unrelenting in their accusations?

- 2) How surprising is it to see Job proclaim that he will at some point **see God** in his flesh?
- 3) How does progressive revelation flesh out Job's confidence in his Redeemer?
- 4) What is the timing of this anticipated vindication and divine judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Francis Andersen: The great matter for disagreement is **when** Job thinks this event [seeing His Redeemer God] will transpire. Some, appealing to the end of the story, especially **42:5**, and relying also on a general belief that the hope of personal resurrection is not present in the book, maintain that Job still expects vindication in this life, in spite of all that he has said about the imminence of his death. Others, while admitting that the passage falls short of a full statement of faith in personal bodily resurrection, find in it the hope of a favourable meeting with God **after death** as a genuine human being. We think that there are several good reasons for accepting the second position.

- First, there would be no need for Job to deposit a written testimony, if he expects to be vindicated before he dies.
- Secondly, the word translated *earth*, as used in Job, is constantly connected with Sheol, and the statement that the Redeemer lives is a direct answer to the fact that a man dies (**14:10**).
- The repetition of the word *after(-wards)* in the prominent position at the beginning of **verses 25b** and **26a** suggests an interval, or even, with the meaning at last, something **eschatological**.
- Finally, the argument that Job does not expect personal reconstitution as a man, because this idea entered Judaism only towards the very end of the biblical period, can be dismissed in the light of much recent research that shows interest in the after-life as an ancient concern for Israelite faith. In particular, the outcome of our study of such passages as **Job 14:13ff.**, if valid,

Cyril Barber: It is interesting to take Job's statement bit-by-bit.

- First he knew that he had a Redeemer whose duty it was to redress the wrongs done to him (cf. **Leviticus 25:48; Deuteronomy 19:6-12**).
- Second, he affirmed that his Redeemer was even then alive – a flesh-and-blood reality – and not someone who would one day come into existence. Of course, this points to the preincarnate Christ, the Eternal Word, who was with God the Father before time began (cf. **John 1:1-3, 14**).
- Third, he also believed that at the end of time his Redeemer would take His stand upon the earth.

- And fourth, that there would be a **bodily resurrection** when wrongs would be righted and those who have faithfully served the Lord during their lifetime will be rewarded.

Job's brief testament to his faith leaves open for discussion many areas of thought that progressive revelation fills in, and which, under the Spirit of God, have been elaborated upon in both the Old and New Testaments. One of these is Job's firm belief in the bodily resurrection in which he joyfully anticipated the fact that even after his death "*I, even I, shall see God for myself.*"

David Thompson: Job was surrounded by hostile and hateful forces who were speaking out against him. Job was a man who was hurting and a man who was threatened, and in many ways a man who was alone. But deep inside, he had a sense about him that God would set this record straight.

WHEN A RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS HURTING AND BEING FALSELY ACCUSED, GOD WILL GIVE THAT PERSON A SENSE THAT HE WILL EVENTUALLY COME TO HIS RESCUE AND PUNISH THOSE WHO HAVE DONE EVIL AGAINST HIM.

Warren Wiersbe: At this point, Job uttered another of his statements of faith that in this book punctuate his many expressions of grief and pain. It is significant that Job would go from the depths of despair to the heights of faith, and then back into the depths again. This is often the normal experience of people experiencing great suffering. The skies will be dark and stormy, a ray of light will suddenly shine through, and then the storm will come again.

In spite of what some preachers say, very few people can maintain a constant high level of faith and courage in times of severe pain and trial. **John Henry Jowett**, at one time known as "the greatest preacher in the English-speaking world," wrote to a friend: "I wish you wouldn't think I am such a saint. You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched, and everything appears most murky" (John Henry Jowett, by **Arthur Porritt**, P. 290.)

Derek Kidner: Job feels acute isolation; God has forsaken him. It is one of Satan's strategies to make God out to be our enemy, by "working the soul", as **Thomas Brooks** put it, "to make false inferences from the cross actings of Providence". We see this in David's conclusions in **Psalms 77**. He is in distress, unable to sleep and his "*soul refused to be comforted*" (**Psalms 77:2**). What is the conclusion that he draws from this? God has rejected him forever, his love has vanished, his promises have failed, his mercy is forgotten and his compassion has turned to anger (**vv. 7-9**). "God can look sourly," **Brooks** comments, "and chide bitterly, and strike heavily, even where and when he loves dearly. The hand of God was very much against Job, and yet his love, his heart, was very much set upon Job . . . The hand of God was sore against David and Jonah, when his heart was much set upon them. He that shall conclude that the heart of God is

against those that his hand is against, will condemn the generation of the just, whom God unjustly would not have condemned.

There are three remedies to this condition.

1. **What we desire is not necessarily what is best for us.** As Brooks says, “Physic often works contrary to the patient’s desires, when it doth not work contrary to their good.”
2. Recall that **God works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28)**. God’s control of providence is comprehensive. The individual pieces of the jigsaw may appear haphazard and without form, but when put together they compose a perfect picture. “The motions of divine providence are so dark, so deep, so changeable, that the wisest and noblest souls cannot tell what conclusions to make.”
3. **All of God’s dealings with us – even if he should hand us over to the devil for a season of testing – will only better help us on the road to heaven.** As we have seen before, Job’s counsellors engaged in a “this-worldly” frame of reference. They neglected the notion of a world to come where wrongs are righted and injustices put right. We must recall continually that this world is not the only world there is; that life on earth at best is but a preparation for a larger, richer, more important and endless life beyond.

TEXT: Job 20:1-29

TITLE: THE PORTION OF THE WICKED MAN

BIG IDEA:

THE HORRIBLE FATE OF THE WICKED, WHILE TRUE, BEARS NO APPLICATION TO THE RIGHTEOUS IN THEIR SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION:

Tremper Longman: Zophar concludes the second cycle of the friends' arguments with his second speech of the debate. He is offended at what he hears from Job and feels compelled to respond. He appeals to an authority beyond himself, a spiritual authority (v. 3).

Zophar then delivers one long description of the horrible consequences that will come on the wicked (vv. 4–29). Though they might appear to prosper in the present, this prosperity will be short lived, and like Bildad in **chap. 18**, he argues that they will ultimately have a bad end. He ends his speech by confidently stating, *“This is the lot of people who are guilty before God, the inheritance decreed by God”* (20:29).

John Hartley: In this speech Zophar treats only the negative tenet of the doctrine of retribution, the certain punishment of the wicked. No matter how high a sinner may seem to rise, his downfall will come quickly. The deceitful deeds that have led to his success bear in themselves a deadly poison that will destroy their doer. God himself enters the fray as a mighty warrior to bring down this arrogant foe. Then God holds court to pronounce the final sentence against that evildoer. In the end a torment sweeps away that guilty party and all that he has.

David Atkinson: Zophar, sadly, has little genuineness, even less warmth, and no empathy at all!

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

David Clines: Zophar's second speech is neatly structured. After the conventional exordium (vv 2–3), his traditional material on the fate of the wicked falls into three sections:

- (a) How thorough is the annihilation of the wicked! (vv 4–11).
- (b) There is no lasting profit from wrongdoing (vv 12–23).
- (c) The inescapable end of the wicked (vv 24–29).

Like the other friends, Zophar confines himself in this speech of the second cycle almost exclusively to a depiction of the **fate of the wicked**, though to a different purpose and effect from the other friends. Whereas for Eliphaz (**chap. 15**) the fate of the wicked is a picture of what Job is not, for Bildad (chap. 18) it is a picture of what Job may become, and for Zophar it is a picture of **what Job will not avoid without a radical change**.

E.S.P. Heavenor: Suffering Job appears in a false light as sinning Job. The false light on man results from a distorted vision of God. There is nothing in Zophar's words to suggest that God is anything more than an impatient judge, as impatient as Zophar himself. "When the zealot makes his own opinions and sentiments the standard of divinity, there is a magnified Zophar on the throne of the universe" (**Strahan**).

Charles Swindoll: Zophar is delivering his lecture not unlike a novice coloring by the numbers – his numbers. To this man, everything is crystal clear and overly simple. Everything can be reduced to simplistic axioms, which explains why Zophar stands so firm in his comments about the brevity of life, the temporary pleasures of wickedness, and the judgment of God. Job will soon point out the error of Zophar's analysis, but first let's be sure we track the man's thinking.

(:1) PROLOGUE – RESPONSE OF ZOPHAR

"Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,"

I. (:2-3) THE HACKNEYED FEEDBACK OF ZOPHAR – DRIVEN TO RESPOND

A. Driven to Respond by Troubling Thoughts

"Therefore my disquieting thoughts make me respond,"

B. Driven to Respond by Inward Agitation

"Even because of my inward agitation."

B1. Driven to Respond by Insulting Attacks

"I listened to the reproof which insults me,"

A1. Driven to Respond by a Desire to Impart Wisdom

"And the spirit of my understanding makes me answer."

Chiastic structure: A / B / B1 / A1

Elmer Smick: Zophar takes Job's words, especially his closing words in **19:28–29**, as a personal affront. Job has dared to assert that on Zophar's theory of retribution, Zophar himself is due for punishment. To Zophar such can only happen to the wicked.

Zophar is the most emotional of the three friends; and he is not about to let Job's rebuke go unanswered, though in **chapter 19** Job earnestly pleaded for a withdrawal of their charges. Here he has nothing new to say to Job but speaks with passion. The speech is full of terrifying imagery.

John Hartley: Taking Job's complaint about the way the friends have treated him and Job's solemn warnings as a personal rebuke, Zophar feels grieved and insulted. His irritation is visible in the fiery tone of this speech. Nevertheless, he promises an insightful response with the words *the spirit of my understanding gives me an answer*. This phrase means both that Zophar's spirit is compelling him to respond to Job (cf. **32:18**) and that his words come from reasoned insight (cf. **Fohrer**). This is his way of reassuring Job that his speech will convey wisdom.

David Clines: Zophar's response to Job's new theology is an appeal to reason. The "*impulse from his understanding*" that supplies him with the words of this chapter is something he fondly imagines is the product of pure reason. Unfortunately for him, his very next words (**v 4a**) show the source from which his "reason" has been fed: it is the wisdom of the ancients, undiluted and uncontaminated by any truly original thought of his own. "Unlike the suffering Job, who has had everything shattered to pieces, and who feels himself crushed and exhausted, Zophar remains rooted in the native soil of his rationalist wisdom teaching, and draws strength from it" (**Fohrer**).

II. (:4-29) THE HORRIBLE FATE OF THE WICKED

A. (:4-11) Momentary Triumph (High Visibility) Trumped by Permanent Disappearance

David Clines: This is fairly evidently a **self-contained unit**, partly because it moves to a point of closure with **v 11b** ("*lies down in the dust*") and partly because a new sustained metaphor of food begins in **v 12**. But what precisely is the point of this strophe? **Rowley** labels it "the brevity of the triumph of the wicked," **Habel** "Rapid Fall of the Wicked," **Fohrer** "The early and utter fall of the evildoer" (**vv 4–7**) and "The apparent good fortune of the evildoer" (**vv 8–11**), **Terrien** "The disappearance (*évanescence*) of the wicked" (**vv 6–9, 11**), **Szczygiel** "The brief good fortune of the godless, even of the greatest" (**vv 1–6**) and "Sudden loss of wealth and health" (**vv 7–12**). Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect that a strophe will develop a single primary thought, but we may surely ask **What is the dominant metaphor here**. If we do, we shall not fasten on "brevity" but on the visual image of "absence" or "disappearance," since that is obviously the most sustained image, through **vv 7–9**. The wicked man ceases to exist like fuel for the fire (**v 7a**), like a dream that can never be found (**v 8**), like a person who disappears from the sight of friends and family forever (**vv 7b, 9**). This evanescence occurs despite the high visibility of the wicked in life: he may be as tall as heaven (**v 6**)—a visual metaphor. So the evanescence is set up against its opposite, an appearance of solidity, of occupying space. That visual contrast is then depicted temporally: now you see him, now you don't. **The prominence of the wicked turns into the invisibility of the wicked.**

1. (:4-5) Triumph is Fleeting

*“Do you know this from of old,
From the establishment of man on earth,
5 That the triumphing of the wicked is short,
And the joy of the godless momentary?”*

John Hartley: Zophar begins his exposition with a rhetorical question. The formulation of the question implies that should Job deny the answer, he would in effect be saying that he denies the oldest, most honored teaching of the wise. The wisdom from them is true because of its great antiquity; it goes back to God’s placing man on earth. . . . Job should know the ancient wisdom, which teaches that the mirth of the wicked is brief. While the godless may experience the ringing joy of festivity (*renānā*), their joy is hollow, being but for a brief moment. Zophar is arguing that the punishment of the wicked is an integral part of the world order. It is thus unthinkable that there may be an exception, even in Job’s case, to this moral law.

2. (:6-9) Memory is Forgotten

*“Though his loftiness reaches the heavens,
And his head touches the clouds,
7 He perishes forever like his refuse;
Those who have seen him will say, ‘Where is he?’
8 He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him;
Even like a vision of the night he is chased away.
9 The eye which saw him sees him no more,
And his place no longer beholds him.”*

Peter Wallace: *He will perish forever like his own dung!* Remember that Job and his friends are sitting on the **ash heap** – the place where the dung was burned. The image (and the smells) would have been all around them!

John Hartley: vv. 6-7 – The higher a wicked person climbs the ladder of success, the harder his fall. Having gained power and wealth, this person’s height mounts up to heaven and his head appears to touch the clouds. Zophar is drawing on the mythic portrait of the mighty ruler who rises from poverty to dominate the world (e.g., **Isa. 14; Ezek. 28**). Swelled with pride this monarch thinks that he is a god. But at the peak of his glory this giant falls, tumbling to the abyss as swiftly as he rose to prominence (cf. **Amos 9:2; Obad. 4**); he will perish forever. This godless person who was applauded by the masses will be reduced to insignificance. The same masses will taunt him by asking, *Where is he?* This question underscores the pleasure that the very ones who applauded him take in his disappearance. There will be no lasting memory of his triumph. It will be as though he had never been.

Trevor Longman: In v. 5 Zophar asserts that the **success of the wicked is temporary**, even if they reach the highest pinnacles of success. They may reach the sky, so to speak, and still come crumbling down. Indeed, they will disappear. **Verse 7a** puts it in

an interesting way: they “*will perish forever like their dung.*” Dung perishes over time and leaves a smell, at least for a while. Their disappearance will cause their friends to ask, “Where are they?” Once so prominent, they are no longer to be found on the scene (v. 7b). Indeed, their existence will be like the existence of dreams, ephemeral (v. 8). Dreams often seem real until the dreamer wakes up and realizes that they are an illusion. The events in the dreams never happened. The success of the wicked, according to Zophar, is like that. Once success and wealth disappear, they will seem as if they were never real. The idea that wicked people’s temporary success “flies away” is somewhat reminiscent of **Prov. 23:5**, which pictures wealth flying away, but this time like an eagle: “*it will surely grow wings like an eagle and fly heavenward.*”

3. (:10) Reparations Impoverish His Sons

*“His sons favor the poor,
And his hands give back his wealth.”*

Elmer Smick: **Oppressing the poor** is the mark of the truly wicked (vv.10, 19). On this subject Job has no quarrel with Zophar (see **31:16–23**). But, of course, he denies being that kind of person.

John Hartley: The vast wealth this wicked person has accumulated will not endure, not even as a part of his family’s inheritance. The nature of his punishment means that his children will also suffer for his wickedness. His sons will have to redress the poor, those impoverished by the evil deeds of their father. As just retribution, the evildoer’s massive wealth will go back to those from whom he has coerced it (cf. **5:5**). Zophar is renouncing the faulty belief that one can amass wealth by unjust practices in order to leave it as an inheritance to his children.

4. (:11) Vitality is Viscerated

*“His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
But it lies down with him in the dust.”*

Definition of Viscerated: To remove the item that makes a person or thing strong

David Clines: The thought of the premature death of the wicked is appended to the strophe, which otherwise has concerned simply his disappearance from earth: he vanishes, and that before his time.

B. (:12-23) Momentary Enjoyment Trumped by Poisonous Consequences

David Clines: This second strophe defines itself by the **sustained metaphor of eating**: we have the mouth (v 12), the tongue (v 12), the palate (v 13), the stomach (v 14), the innards (v 14), the belly (vv 15, 20, 23); there is savoring (v 12), swallowing (v 15), vomiting and disgorging (v 15), sucking (v 16), disgorging (v 18), not swallowing (v 18), eating (v 21); there is sweetness (v 12), oil, honey, and cream (v 17), food (v 23); above all, there is fullness of abundance (v 22) and filling to the full (v 23).

Not surprisingly, the metaphor is deployed in a variety of ways. The primary theme appears to be that the **sinner gains no lasting profit from his wrongdoing**. This links back into the primary image of the previous strophe (vv 4–11), the ultimate disappearance of the evildoer. The food he eats leads to his death, not his life.

- In the first place, the image is of food that is pleasant to the taste but sours the stomach and is vomited up (vv 12–15), so that it does not function as life-supporting food.
- In a second version of the image, the food that he eats is itself actually deadly poison, which prevents him enjoying real food and compels him to vomit it up (vv 16–19).
- The third use of the image has him eating as a glutton and consuming all available food so that he possesses no further stocks of food and thus through his appetite is brought to starvation (vv 20–22).
- Another dimension to the image is provided by the notations that God makes him vomit up his food (v 15b) and that the food he believes is sustaining him is actually the anger of God that is bloating him (v 23).

Throughout these varying deployments of the controlling metaphor is the idea that there is **no lasting profit from his eating** (v 18b).

1. (:12-16) Deceptive Sweetness of Wickedness

a. (:12-14) Sweetness of Wickedness Transformed to Poison

*“Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
And he hides it under his tongue,
13 Though he desires it and will not let it go,
But holds it in his mouth,
14 Yet his food in his stomach is changed
To the venom of cobras within him.”*

John Hartley: In these verses Zophar vividly sets forth the axiom that **evil deeds contain their own penalty**. A wicked person savors his evildoing just as a child holds a sweet morsel under the tongue, refusing to swallow it until he squeezes out every bit of favor. But no matter how long he keeps the morsel under his tongue, it dissolves eventually. While the wicked person also relishes the sweet taste of evil, he will have to swallow his evildoing in time. Then it will turn in his stomach, unleashing its curse against him. It is like poisonous food; even though it has been sugar-coated for a pleasant taste, it unfailingly releases its poison in the stomach. Soon the victim is doubled over in excruciating pain. His insides burn so hotly that it feels as though they are full of venom. Without any antidote for the poison, he will die in agonizing pain.

b. (:15) Swallowing Riches of Wickedness only to Vomit Them Up

*“He swallows riches, But will vomit them up;
God will expel them from his belly.”*

John Hartley: The rich delicacies of his evildoing will inflict him with torturous vomiting. God himself will forcefully administer the emetic, as the verb disgorges (*hōrîš*) indicates. While wicked deeds contain their own punishment, God himself

activates that punishment. It is important to observe that in this manner of reasoning no clear distinction is maintained between primary and secondary causes.

- c. (:16) Slain by the Poison of Wickedness
*“He sucks the poison of cobras;
The viper's tongue slays him.”*

Tremper Longman: Verses 12–16 develop a single image of evil and its consequences. Evil is like a delicacy that one eats and savors before it turns bad and those who have consumed it vomit. At first it is sweet to the taste (v. 12a) of the wicked, so sweet that they put it under their tongue to keep from swallowing it and thus lose the taste. They spare it from going to the stomach (v. 13a), sucking every bit of sweetness out of it. But v. 14 notes a change. What was once sweet is now sour, even poisonous. It is like the poisonous venom of an asp. It makes them sick, and they vomit it up (v. 15). Verse 16 then states that what they put in their mouth was really the poison of an asp. Its sweet taste was an illusion. What they thought would strengthen them will cause their death.

Verse 15 indicates that the subject is wealth. That is what tastes sweet to them but in the final analysis will hurt them, and they will finally have to give it up. Zophar in this speech had earlier commented about the brevity of the joy and wealth of the wicked (v. 5). Here he seems to indicate that wealth itself will hurt the wicked and ultimately lead to their death.

John Hartley: Intricate plans to outwit another for wealth obsess him. But he falls to his own cunning. The very snake he loved to play with bites him.

2. (:17) Denial of the Fundamental Good Things in Life
*“He does not look at the streams,
The rivers flowing with honey and curds.”*

Tremper Longman: Verse 17 continues the description of the **disappointment of the wicked**. While they hoped to gain a life of luxury through their evil, Zophar says that they will not even look on streams of oil, wadis of honey and butter. “*Oil*” refers to olive oil, a staple of the area used for food, medicine, skin cleansing, and more. “A good supply of fresh oil was a sign of stability, prosperity, and the Lord’s blessing. . . while the loss or lack of it was a sign of his judgment.” Zophar is thus saying that these wicked will not even look on (or perhaps experience in the sense of partake of) oil. The same is true of honey and butter, luxury food items. Again the theme is that the wicked will not partake of accoutrements of wealth and luxury.

John Hartley: Cursed, this greedy evildoer will not even enjoy the land’s basic produce. In Palestine oil, honey, and curds, along with wheat, were the staples. With oil a person anoints himself, cooks his food, and lights his dwelling. Honey, usually date syrup, enriches his diet, and curds offer him refreshment from the heat of the day. When the land produces these staples in abundance, it is said that there are *streams of oil and rivers flowing with honey and curds*.

3. (:18-19) Deeds of Oppression Bring No Lasting Joy

*“He returns what he has attained
And cannot swallow it;
As to the riches of his trading,
He cannot even enjoy them.
For he has oppressed and forsaken the poor;
He has seized a house which he has not built.”*

Tremper Longman: The wicked will not stay rich, and they will not enjoy their riches.

Elmer Smick: **vs. 19** -- The evil man’s wicked deeds, especially robbing the poor, are tasty food that pleases his palate but turns sour in his stomach. God will force him to vomit up such ill-gained riches. Zophar’s teaching conforms to Proverbs’ point that the wealth of fools will not last, and even while they have wealth, it will not help, but even hurt them (**Pr 11:4; 21:6**). In **v.19** Zophar claims that fools get rich off the backs of the poor, a practice condemned by Proverbs (**Pr 28:27; 29:7**). In his peroration (**chs. 29–31**) Job will stress his own social conscience and strongly deny Zophar’s veiled accusation.

4. (:20-23) Disappointment of a Frustrated Life that Will Suffer God’s Wrath

a. (:20-21) No Rest or Contentment

*“Because he knew no quiet within him
He does not retain anything he desires.
21 Nothing remains for him to devour,
Therefore his prosperity does not endure.”*

John Hartley: **Vs. 20** -- That evil person’s successes in crushing the poor have inflamed his passion for things and for power. His craving constantly gnaws at him. No matter how much he feeds it, it refuses to subside. He finds no satisfaction in what he has accumulated. Controlled by his drives, he never has a moment of rest.

Vs. 21 -- No one is safe from such a person’s plots to dominate and to extort. Since no one is beyond his evil influence, nothing of his prosperity will endure. The principle is the greater the evil, the greater the punishment.

b. (:22-23) No Escaping the Retribution of God’s Wrath

*“In the fulness of his plenty he will be cramped;
The hand of everyone who suffers will come against him.
When he fills his belly, God will send His fierce anger on him
And will rain it on him while he is eating.”*

David Clines: The wicked person thinks that he has been satisfying his greed; but he will not know what satisfaction really is until he is filled by the wrath of God.

C. (:24-28) Mandatory Destruction that Proves Terrifying and Inescapable

Francis Andersen: vv. 23-28 -- This seems to be a **distinct poem**. The verb forms express wishes, as if Zophar is calling down God's wrath on the wicked, like the curse in 5:3. In the references to various weapons there are painful echoes of Job's description of God's savage attack upon him (**chapters 16 and 19**).

David Clines: This third strophe has as its principal theme **the inescapability of the end of the wicked**. That is the significance of the military narrative (vv 24–25b): even if he escapes one weapon, he will fall to another that will prove fatal. There is then a depiction of the arrival of death itself, which he experiences as terror and as darkness. More objectively, his death is described as being consumed by divine wrath (v 26), and then a cosmic imagery of a legal procedure presses home the point that he has no defense against a death sentence (v 27). Parallel to the consuming fire of v 26 is the overflowing waters that “roll away” him and his house (v 28). Finally, a summary appraisal (v 29) draws together the twin strands of the evildoer's fate as both his own creation (cf. “inheritance”) and as divine punishment (cf. “portion”). The imagery here is almost exclusively **violent**; apart from the law court images of v 27, there is the battlefield image of v 24, focusing down to the close-up on the wounded man pulling the arrow from his body only to lose his vitals in the process (v 25), the fireball (v 26b–c), the flood (v 28).

1. (:24-25a) Bitterness of Penetrating Attack

*“He may flee from the iron weapon,
But the bronze bow will pierce him.
25 It is drawn forth and comes out of his back,
Even the glittering point from his gall.”*

Elmer Smick: When a wicked man's belly is filled and there is nothing left for him to devour, God then vents his anger against him (vv.20–21). The man flees from an iron weapon only to be shot in the back by a glittering bronze arrow that must be pulled out of his liver (vv.24–25).

Tremper Longman: While fleeing an iron weapon (suggesting a weapon that would be hard if not impossible to break), they are pierced by a bronze-tipped arrow. They are shot in the gall bladder, spewing forth bitterness. They will suffer a severe fate, so a heavy fear overtakes them (v. 25c).

2. (:25b-26) Terror of Certain Destruction

*“Terrors come upon him,
26 Complete darkness is held in reserve for his treasures,
And unfanned fire will devour him;
It will consume the survivor in his tent.”*

Tremper Longman: Both darkness and fire represent punishments. The unfanned fire may be a reference to lightning, which God will send in the direction of the wicked.

Their guilt will be revealed broadly, and the entire earth will seek recompense. Because of the anger of God, everything will be taken from them.

3. (:27-28) Despair of Complete Defeat

a. (:27) Opposed by Heaven and Earth

*“The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
And the earth will rise up against him.”*

David Clines: The implication is that the crimes of the evildoer are on such a scale that heaven and earth have been compelled to take cognizance of them; they can then be called upon to testify to what they have seen and heard (cf. **Ps 19:2–3 [1–2]** where the heaven “*recounts*” God’s glory and one day “*shows knowledge*” to the next of what it has learned). Heaven and earth also function as enduring witnesses. . .

b. (:28a) Loss of Family

“The increase of his house will depart;”

c. (:28b) Loss of Possessions

“His possessions will flow away in the day of His anger.”

John Hartley: With this metaphor Zophar is undercutting the basis of Job’s hope. Job is convinced that he is innocent. Since all the visible evidence is against him, his only hope to prove his innocence rests with his heavenly witness (**16:18–20**), namely, God his kinsman-redeemer (**19:25**). But Zophar attacks Job’s bold, venturesome statement as presumptuous. For him Job’s daring faith is the apex of audacity. In it is contained the cause for the final blow to Job. When the divine court hears Job’s case, the heavens will bear witness to Job’s guilt. Since God is already convicting Job, it is impossible to believe that the heavens would give testimony that would counter God’s judgment. In thinking otherwise Job is deluded. The court will pronounce the sentence of total destruction against the evildoer.

(:29) Summary Thesis

*“This is the wicked man’s portion from God,
Even the heritage decreed to him by God.”*

John Hartley: In conclusion Zophar **restates his thesis**. God has assigned the exact portion that will befall the wicked person. Portion (*hēleq*) means a person’s rightful share of something, e.g., a share in the spoil from war or a lot of land or a part of an inheritance. Here the sinner’s final punishment is called his portion, the heritage decreed for him by God. The language of portions and inheritance is used to indicate that the evildoer’s lot is just and determined.

G. Campbell Morgan: These closing words were in the nature of a summary of all he had been saying. The sufferings he had described were such as fell to the wicked, and that by Divine appointment. All this was true. But other things were true, of which he

seemed to have no knowledge... The **narrowness of Zophar's philosophy** made him unjust to Job.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Zophar turn against Job so aggressively?
- 2) What is the point of impressing upon Job the terrible fate of the wicked?
- 3) How can something that tastes so good (wealth, pleasure, luxurious living, oppression of the poor, etc.) so quickly morph into a poison that destroys?
- 4) What is the significance of these being the last words Zophar uttered to Job?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Clines: Zophar has done nothing in this speech but portray the fate of the wicked; what he means by this portrayal is not easily discerned. He has felt Job's refusal to accept the advice of his friends a reproach (v 3a), and he has probably been nettled by Job's last words that have declared the friends liable to judgment (19:28–29). But such annoyance would not justify him in pronouncing Job one of those wicked whose doom he delineates here. For Job has not evidently been one of the godless proud (v 6) who have savored wickedness (vv 12–13) and lived off its gains (vv 18–19). To what end would the poet have Zophar inform Job that his wickedness is quintessential, that Job will suffer the inescapable doom of the most nefarious of his class? What can be Zophar's meaning then?

If we may judge by his stance in his previous speech—and in the absence of any clear position here that seems an entirely reasonable procedure—Zophar believes that Job is guilty and deserves what he suffers, and no doubt more than he suffers (11:6c). If he does not adjust his way of life he will find a future unfolding for him identical to that of the wicked: the loss of hope and the absence of security will lead to an inescapable doom (11:20). Job however has the opening for a quite different life, a life of piety that will bring security (11:15, 18–19).

This too is how Job relates to the wicked in the present depiction. If Job refuses to eradicate from his life the evil his present suffering bears witness to, his fate will be the inheritance of the wicked (v 29). But it is up to Job to decide where his destiny lies; and Zophar, in a genuine effort to be constructive, paints the grimmest picture he knows how of the wicked's fate in the hope that Job will remove himself with all due haste from any shadow of identification with it.

David Thompson: In **Job 20**, we come to the final speech of Zophar the Naamathite. In this speech, he accuses Job of being a ruthless, evil, money hungry materialist who has bilked poor people out of their money. This was his explanation for what was happening to Job. God was punishing Job for oppressing the poor. There is no hint of discussion about a God who would or could forgive Job if he would repent; there is just the invention of a story about Job's suffering because of all the evil he had done to the poor. It is possible that Zophar was the man guilty of oppressing the poor and in his own guilt, he accuses Job. What we do know is this:

WHEN SATAN IS CAUSING A PERSON TO SPEAK AGAINST ONE FAITHFUL,
HE WILL EMOTIONALLY SAY THINGS THAT SEEM LOGICAL, BUT AREN'T
FACTUAL, FOR WHICH GOD WILL HOLD HIM HIGHLY ACCOUNTABLE.

Now this chapter is a masterpiece of verbal evil. Zophar uses bits and pieces of true principles to make untrue allegations against Job. Zophar is very strong in his convictions, very strong in his emotions and very strong in his reason, but he is also very wrong before God in everything he says. . .

It seems to me that Satan will try to accuse you in a couple of ways:

- 1) He will try to accuse you of things you haven't really done.
- 2) He will try to convince you that your sin can't really be forgiven.

Warren Wiersbe: Zophar makes three affirmations to prove that the fate of the wicked is indeed terrible.

1) Their life is brief (:4-11)

According to Zophar, the higher the wicked man climbs in his success, the farther down he will fall when his judgment comes. When he falls, he will go down the drain like his own dung; and people will ask, "*Where is he?*" (:6-7) He will vanish like a forgotten dream or like a night vision that cannot be called back (v. 8).

2) Their pleasure is temporary (:12-19)

The wicked man enjoys sin the way people enjoy food, keeping it in his mouth where he can "taste it" before swallowing it. . . But eventually that delicious food in his mouth becomes poison in his system, and he becomes ill and vomits everything up. While enjoying his sin, he hasn't noticed that he's been bitten by a poisonous viper and is destined for death. In other words, sin carries with it both enjoyment and punishment; and if you want the one, you must also accept the other. The pleasures of sin are *only for a season* (**Heb. 11:25**).

But God's judgment involves much more: the wicked man not only gets sick from his sin, but he does not enjoy the everyday blessings of life (**20:17**). . . His taste for sin has ruined his enjoyment of the fundamental blessings of life. . .

He makes a third point in **20:18-19**: the wicked man will not be able to enjoy (swallow down) some of the things he labored for. Because he acquired his wealth through

sinning, that wealth will not satisfy him.

3) Their death is painful (:20-29)

Derek Kidner: Zophar has nothing more to say. These are his **final words to Job**. He seems to have made up his mind about his friend and given him up as a lost cause. He doesn't even bother to call Job to repentance, such is his conviction that he is utterly lost and doomed. Zophar has come across like a record where the needle has got stuck in the groove. In a forlorn attempt to get something concrete into his charges against his friend he seems to have a particular grudge concerning Job's wealth. He just cannot get it out of his mind that Job must have acquired it by ill-gotten means (cf. **20:10, 18, 21, 22, 26, 28**). It may well be that Zophar is guilty of envy. It would not be the first case of a preacher who has castigated his audience for something that lies more appropriately at the door of his own heart. When we are engaged in judgmental counselling of this sort, we need to make sure that our motives are pure. One cannot help suspecting that Zophar's were not.

TEXT: Job 21:1-34

TITLE: *JOB'S SECOND REPLY TO ZOPHAR – REFUTATION OF RIGID APPLICATION OF DOCTRINE OF RETRIBUTION*

BIG IDEA:

THE OBSERVABLE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED REFUTES THE RIGID APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF RETRIBUTION

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: On this occasion Job addresses his remarks entirely to the friends. In the style of a wisdom disputation he challenges their simplified view of the doctrine of retribution. Motivated by a desire to prove his own uprightness even though the evidence of his affliction testifies against him, he argues the opposite side of that thesis, namely, that a person's prosperity does not necessarily mean that he is righteous. Many who are rich in material things reject God openly and blatantly. If this is true so is the opposite, i.e., those suffering beneath heavy burdens are not necessarily sinners. If in God's providence the wicked can prosper, surely the devout may suffer. The friends, therefore, should give him the benefit of the doubt and reach out to him in comfort rather than with caustic and condemning words. . .

Tough Questions about the Doctrine of Retribution:

Job develops his thesis that the wicked prosper in four parts:

- (1) the blessings of the wicked (vv. 7–16);
- (2) the infrequency of the wicked being punished (vv. 17–21);
- (3) the failure of the doctrine of retribution (vv. 22–26); and
- (4) a rejection of the friends' anticipated rebuttal (vv. 27–33).

John MacArthur: Job's reply to Zophar's last speech, ending the second cycle of speeches, refuted the simplistic set of laws by which the mockers lived. He showed that the wicked prosper, and since it is clear that they do (they had argued that the wicked *only* suffer), then by inference, perhaps the righteous suffer. This presented serious problems for their supposed open and shut case against Job.

Tremper Longman: Job has argued that the wicked prosper, but he doubts that his point has sunk in, as witnessed by Zophar's last simplistic speech. Job then puts forward his perspective based on his observation and experience. The wicked thrive and are contemptuous toward God (vv. 6–17). He concludes that God is out of the loop and that the wicked are successful apart from him. God should punish the wicked immediately and not wait, and he should especially not punish children for father's offenses (vv. 18–21). But, according to Job in vv. 22–26, God does not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked in his treatment of them. People die or thrive independent of moral considerations. That is the way God works, and no one can do anything about it. Job ends his speech (vv. 27–34) with a final jab at his opponents. They ask him for

evidence that the wicked prosper, and he tells them that it is common knowledge. Their speeches are empty and ineffective (v. 34).

David Clines: The **nodal verse** must be the opening rhetorical question of the speech proper, “*Why do the wicked live. . . ?*” (v. 7). This stands in headline position, and from it devolves the speech as a whole. The answer to the question, though it is never explicitly stated, is evident throughout the speech. It is: “Because there is no moral order in the universe, no principle of retribution and no divine justice.”

Here in this speech he enters into direct dispute with the friends, addressing them and them alone from the beginning to the end of the speech. He actually refers to their arguments—something he has rarely done before. And his language is cooler, less aggressive. . .

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

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB REPLIES TO ZOPHAR

“Then Job answered,”

I. (:2-6) APPEAL FOR A SYMPATHETIC HEARING

A. (:2-3) Listen Up

*“Listen carefully to my speech,
And let this be your way of consolation.
3 Bear with me that I may speak;
Then after I have spoken, you may mock.”*

David Clines: Job ironically observes that the biggest consolation his friends could offer him would be to **say nothing at all**. Their speeches defending the doctrine of retribution have made them into “*torturer-comforters*” (16:2), even though they themselves (or Eliphaz at least) have represented their words as “*God’s encouragements*” (15:11). It would not of course be a consolation for them to keep silence; it would be less than a consolation, as the turn of phrase shows: “*let that [your silence] be the comfort you offer me.*” But the mere absence of their persistent putting him in the wrong would almost seem a consolation in itself. Job knows he is right, of course, and he does not want to be gainsaid any longer. Whatever they say will be wrong, and their “consolation” is bound to be, at the end of the day, “vanity, emptiness” and “deceit” (perhaps meaning “infidelity to God”) (v 34).

B. (:4-5) Look at Me

*“As for me, is my complaint to man?
And why should I not be impatient?
5 Look at me, and be astonished,
And put your hand over your mouth.”*

Tremper Longman: Job's Impatience -- Job then informs them that his complaints are not about how he is being treated by mortals. Granted, he has complained about the three friends (as recently as vv. 2–3!), but his ultimate complaint is not directed at them or any human; rather, he is upset with God himself. Thus he feels justified in his impatience. All the friends have to do is look at his physical and mental deterioration to see why he is impatient. Just the sight of him should cause them to shut their mouths in horror.

David Clines: Presumably the friends have been looking at Job throughout the dialogues, so how can they now heed Job's demand, "*Look at me, turn to me*"? He means that if they were not just to see him physically but to recognize what is before their faces—an innocent man who is being made to suffer by God like one of the wicked—they would be "*appalled*" or "*dumbfounded*" (**JB**) and "*clap [their] hand[s] to [their] mouth[s]*"; the silence that would strike them then would be the silence that Job requires of them (**v 2a**), a silence that would count as consolation (**v 2b**).

Elmer Smick: God would rather have us complain than be indifferent toward him or handle his truths arrogantly and so reduce them to dead maxims. Job's anguish over not understanding what God has been doing is proof that Job is not indifferent or arrogant. It is the counselors who assume they know what is going on.

C. (:6) Lament My Shocking Condition

*"Even when I remember, I am disturbed,
And horror takes hold of my flesh."*

John Hartley: When Job remembers or thinks about his own shocking condition, he becomes so terrified (*nibhaltî*) that shuddering (*pallāṣût*) seizes his flesh. In his first speech Eliphaz had accused Job of being terrified or dismayed and thus lacking in faith (**4:5**). In response Job justifies his emotional distress as inevitable because of the acuteness of his ordeal. The horror he feels is heightened by his realization that his emaciated body denies his cherished belief that God honors faithful service.

David Thompson: In **verse 6**, he says when I think about what I once was and look at what I am now, I am horrified and you should be too.

David Clines: [Alternate view -- Connects **vs. 6** with following verses instead] This verse is connected by most commentators (except **Duhm, Peake, Fohrer, Tur-Sinai**) and versions with what precedes, but to do so is to misunderstand the text. What is it that Job "*remembers*" that causes him dismay and shuddering? It cannot be something about his own condition, his own suffering, or the wrong that is being done to him, because he is conscious of that all the time, and so he can hardly "*remember*" it. It is **something that he knows from experience and observation**, something that is not constantly in the forefront of his mind but that causes him mental distress whenever he thinks about it. It can only be the **happy life of the wicked** and "God's immoral government of the world" (**Peake**), the very subject of this speech as a whole. Their lot, as he pictures it,

troubles him because it proves that there is no justice in the world if the wicked are not punished, and also, no doubt, because he would like to see the kind of retribution in play that would punish evildoers and reward him for his piety instead of leaving him to suffer at the hands of a cruel God.

II. (:7-34) ARGUMENTS REFUTING THE RIGID APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF RETRIBUTION

A. (:7-16) The Wicked Obviously Can Prosper

Francis Andersen: The friends' thesis is that sin produces suffering. Their inference is that suffering proves sin. Job denies both. His attractive sketch of the **carefree life of the wicked** resembles the picture of the good man painted earlier by Eliphaz (5:17–27).

David Thompson: There are six descriptions that Job gives here that are true:

- Wicked people continue through life and become powerful. **21:7**
- Wicked people give their prosperity to their children and live to see them become prosperous. **21:8**
- Wicked people have households that are safe havens seemingly free from God's wrath. **21:9**
- Wicked people prosper and multiply in business. **21:10**
- Wicked people prosper and multiply in pedigree. **21:11-13**
- Wicked people have no interest in God. **21:14-16**

David Guzik: It is impossible to miss the contrast here. All the advantages that many of the wicked seemed to have, Job was deprived of.

- Job is the man whose descendants were cursed and not established.
- Job is the man whose house was subject to fear.
- Job is the man with the rod of God upon him.
- Job is the man whose livestock has perished.
- Job is the man whose children no longer dance.

1. (:7) Wicked People Can Live Long and Powerful Lives

*“Why do the wicked still live,
Continue on, also become very powerful?”*

Francis Andersen: Zophar has just asserted that the wicked die prematurely (20:11). Job maintains the opposite: they reach old age and even improve in health. The Hebrew word translated *power* can refer to both physical prowess, managerial efficiency and material prosperity. In the introverted structure of the poem, **verse 7** is matched by **verse 13**, where *spend their days* means ‘complete their life-span’. . .

Since the clean introverted structure of **verses 7–13** shows them to be a **single unit**, the initial question *Why?* should be applied to each individual statement. Job does not consider the facts to be open to question. It is the **reason** for them he seeks.

John Hartley: The verb *live* refers to a full, prosperous life. The wicked grow old (*‘ātaq*), and they become mighty in *power* (cf. **Ps. 73:12**). Although the penalty for sin is death, everywhere there are jovial, prosperous evildoers, secure and unafraid of loss. It stands to reason then that either they have avoided the penalty for their wicked deeds or the punishment due them has not yet been executed. In either case their penalty is not speedily executed as the friends have held. . .

The clause [*they*] *become mighty in power* (*gāberû hayil*) calls to mind the common phrase *gibbôr hayil*, “*the landed aristocracy*.” Heb. *hayil* means “*strength*” and “*army*” and sometimes “*wealth*.” Heb. *gābar* bears the idea of “*be strong, gain the upper hand*.” That is, these men become leaders of the nation by supporting the state with their wealth and their troops. From the people they receive the highest recognition. Acclaimed as noble citizens, their status covers the wicked deeds that brought them to that prominence. In the following verses Job will detail the multiple blessings that attend such wicked leaders. With this account he is refuting the assertions of Eliphaz (**5:5; 15:20**) and Zophar (**20:15–18**) that the wealth of these faithless men is so ephemeral that it can never be used to advantage. In contrast, he claims that their wealth and prominence is real and lasting. A single proven example would refute the dogmatic theology of the friends.

2. (:8-13) Wicked People Can Enjoy Many Observable Blessings

a. (:8) Blessed with Prosperous Progeny

*Their descendants are established with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes,”*

Francis Andersen: Bildad had asserted that the wicked die childless, as Job looks like doing (**18:19**). Job contradicts this. It is the wicked who have large, happy families, just like anybody else. Again the introversion places the description of the frolicking children (four different Hebrew words are used) in verses **8f.** and **11f.** around the reference to livestock in **verse 10**.

John Hartley: *their offspring* (*še’ēšā’êhem*) may refer to **subsequent generations**. The statement that the success of the wicked benefits their offspring counters both the argument that nothing gained by wrongdoing is passed on to the children as well as the escape clause in the doctrine of retribution that if an arrogant person does enjoy life the punishment due him will fall on his children (e.g., **18:19; 20:21**).

b. (:9) Blessed with Safety and Security

*“Their houses are safe from fear,
Neither is the rod of God on them.”*

Francis Andersen: Eliphaz had asserted that Job’s ‘tent’ would be safe (**5:24**). Job denies this. The *houses* (it could mean either families or estates) of the wicked are **secure**. The rod of God, which Job is feeling (**9:34**), does not fall on them.

John Hartley: The homes of these wicked men are safe [*šālôm*, lit. “*peace*”], free from fear [*paḥad*] or threat of loss (cf. **5:24; 15:21**). This is remarkable, for the fear of sudden disaster is supposed to unsettle the godless (**Prov. 3:25**). But these families do not live under the cloud of such dread. There is no evidence anywhere that God’s punishing rod (*šēḇeṭ*, which has smitten Job (**19:21b**), has struck them with even a single blow. Instead **everything goes well for these evildoers**.

- c. (:10) Blessed with Business Success
*“His ox mates without fail;
His cow calves and does not abort.”*

John Hartley: Their bull impregnates their cow without fail, i.e., without spilling its seed, and the cow bears without miscarriage. The fertility of their cattle is representative of the prosperity in every area of this person’s estate.

- d. (:11-12) Blessed with the Celebration of Joyful Life
*“They send forth their little ones like the flock,
And their children skip about.
They sing to the timbrel and harp
And rejoice at the sound of the flute.”*

John Hartley: This picture represents **idyllic happiness**.

David Clines: The picture of children at play inevitably conjures up feelings of joy, peace, freedom from anxiety, and even innocence (cf. **Zech 8:5**, where the play of children in the city streets symbolizes Jerusalem’s happiness).

- e. (:13) Blessed with Prosperity in Life and Tranquility in Death
*“They spend their days in prosperity,
And suddenly they go down to Sheol.”*

John Hartley: The wicked live a comfortable life and die a quick, easy death. All of their days are spent in prosperity (lit. “*good*,” *tôḇ*) and enjoyment. When their days come to an end, they descend to Sheol quietly and quickly, free from any prolonged, agonizing illness. A **serene death** means that the joy of the wicked is as full as possible. Suffering has never impressed on their mind the horrors of death.

3. (:14-15) Wicked People Openly Reject God

- a. (:14) No Pursuit of Relationship or Obedience
*“And they say to God, ‘Depart from us!
We do not even desire the knowledge of Thy ways.’”*

Tremper Longman: The wicked are far from God and want it that way. In their prosperity and enjoyment, they see absolutely no need for God. They neither serve him nor pray to him. He is more a burden than a help in life (**vv. 14–15**). Here we might remember that the accuser’s charge against Job is that he is not disinterested in his piety

(1:9). He is only righteous because of the reward involved. According to Job, this charge could be leveled toward the wicked, who do not serve God because they see no reward in it. Job, on the other hand, is suffering and innocent, yet he is unwilling merely to cut his losses by cursing God. Rather, he pursues God in search of resolution.

- b. (:15) No Value Seen in Worship or Service of the Almighty
*“Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him,
And what would we gain if we entreat Him?”*

John Hartley: Such stalwart sinners could never be persuaded to serve God by the utilitarian arguments of the friends. Confident of being masters of their own world and without any fear of reprisal from a superior divine force, they deny the teaching of retribution without ever experiencing any grave consequences.

David Clines: After the depiction of the prosperity of the wicked in vv 6–13, a second theme in Job’s speech emerges here: the godlessness of the wicked that goes unpunished. Here it becomes apparent that evildoers are not simply fortunate despite their wrongdoing; they live happy lives despite their express blasphemy against God.

4. (:16) Wicked People, Despite Their Prosperity, Have Nothing to Offer
*“Behold, their prosperity is not in their hand;
The counsel of the wicked is far from me.”*

John Hartley: With a **parenthetical comment** Job emphatically states his own judgment on the happy life of the wicked. Even though they boast of their prosperity, Job, along with the comforters, believes that their success is ephemeral. In the final analysis they do not have ultimate control over their prosperity. In v. 16b Job rejects emphatically his being identified with the counsel of such wicked men. He affirms his own integrity and faith in God even in the midst of his lament over the good that befalls those who reject God. Thus he is arguing against the position of Zophar on two levels:

- (1) since there are wicked men who prosper and live to an old age, his own suffering does not automatically put him into the category of the wicked;
- (2) since he wholeheartedly rejects the counsel of the wicked, he cannot be categorically identified with them.

David Clines: So Job’s animus is not against the wicked, but against God; and it is not so much that God allows the wicked to prosper (Job never expresses hatred for the Sabeans and Chaldeans that have brought him into misery), but that a God who allows the wicked to prosper is inevitably **a God who allows the righteous to suffer**.

Elmer Smick: It helps to compare 22:17–18 with 21:14–16. In **chapter 22** Eliphaz uses Job’s words to his own advantage. So Eliphaz’s words are a commentary on these. Job is saying, *“Look, the prosperity of the wicked is from God despite the fact that their counsel is far from him.”*

B. (:17-21) The Wicked Can Escape Judgment in This Life

1. (:17-18) Counter Examples to the Doctrine of Retribution

*“How often is the lamp of the wicked put out,
Or does their calamity fall on them?
Does God apportion destruction in His anger?
18 Are they as straw before the wind,
And like chaff which the storm carries away?”*

John Hartley: He directly rebuts Bildad’s assertion that “*the light of the wicked is extinguished*” (**18:5**) by asking, How often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? The lamp (*nēr*) symbolizes a healthy life, and snuffed out (*dā’ak*) refers to a premature death by a tragedy brought on by God as punishment for evildoing (cf. **Prov. 13:9; 20:20; 24:20**). . .

Each of Job’s questions expects the answer “very few times, if any.” But any exception to the application of the law of retribution means that it cannot be applied categorically. Consequently, the arguments of the friends will have to be tempered. More specifically they will need to reevaluate Job’s case and come to realize that **the reason for his tragedy must lie outside the law of retribution.**

Peter Wallace: vv. 17-26 -- There are echoes of **Psalms 1** in these verses. Job had said that the “*counsel of the wicked*” is far from him – but then he asks when will the wicked be *like the chaff that the wind blows away*? **Psalms 1** says that *the wicked will not stand in the judgment*, but when does that actually happen? Maybe occasionally – but the pattern of the universe is not that the wicked perish and the righteous prosper!

2. (:19-21) Contradiction of the Theory that God Visits the Judgment on the Sons

a. (:19a) Judgment Theory to Accommodate Doctrine of Retribution

“You say, ‘God stores away a man’s iniquity for his sons.’”

b. (:19b-20) Judgment Only Meaningful if Personally Experienced

*“Let God repay him so that he may know it.
Let his own eyes see his decay,
And let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.”*

Francis Andersen: This theory of the friends, that God is saving up their iniquity for their sons (**verse 19a**), is a blatant evasion, useless as a demonstration of God’s justice (**verse 22**). Justice will be seen to have been done, only when the wicked experience in themselves their destruction as recompense.

c. (:21) Judgment Executed in the Future Can’t Impact the Dead

*“For what does he care for his household after him,
When the number of his months is cut off?”*

(:22) Aside – Exercise Caution in Presuming to Understand God’s Justice

*“Can anyone teach God knowledge,
In that He judges those on high?”*

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

David Guzik: In the broader context, Job is indeed questioning the ways and wisdom of God in not bringing judgment sooner upon the wicked man. At the same time, he sensed that this was wrong, so he corrected himself with his own rhetorical question on this point.

C. (:23-34) The Wicked Cannot be Limited to a Rigid Application of the Doctrine of Retribution

1. (:23-26) Death Treats All Individuals the Same – Regardless of Fortunes in Life

Francis Andersen: Job’s point is not that the good always suffer, while the wicked are always at ease. This generalization is no more true than the formula of his friends that the righteous always prosper and the evil always fail. Life is more **complicated** than that, and it does not disclose any patterns. And death always has the final say, and it says the same thing to everyone. At this stage Job’s realistic observations come close to those of the Preacher (**Eccl. 2:14**; etc.). **Rowley** sums it up well: ‘In life no moral differences explain their diversity of fortune; in death as little do they explain their common fate’ (p. 189).

a. (:23-25) Contrast of Two Possible Conditions in Life

1) (:23-24) Fortunate -- Enjoyment and Satisfaction

*“One dies in his full strength,
Being wholly at ease and satisfied;
24 His sides are filled out with fat,
And the marrow of his bones is moist,”*

2) (:25) Unfortunate -- Bitterness and Deprivation

*“While another dies with a bitter soul,
Never even tasting anything good.”*

b. (:26) Commonality of Identical Outcome in Death

*“Together they lie down in the dust,
And worms cover them.”*

Tremper Longman: the point seems to be that there is no connection between how one lives life, or how one relates to God, and the quality of one's life and death. In this way, Job's observation is the same as Qohelet's: *"Everything is the same for everybody: there is one fate for the righteous and the wicked and for the clean and the unclean, and for the one who sacrifices and for the one who does not sacrifice; as it is for the good, so it is for the sinner; as it is for the one who swears, so it is for the one who is afraid to swear"* (**Eccles. 9:2**). To Job and to Qohelet, this reality means that there is **no justice** in the world or with God.

John Hartley: These two types of people are not classified as good and bad, righteous and wicked, but as **fortunate** and **unfortunate**, regardless of their moral character. Even though on earth they are members of widely different classes, in death they are on the same level. They lie in the dust side by side and worms cover both of them. **Death makes no distinction** based on the nature of their earthly existence. The rewards enjoyed by the healthy person melt into nothingness (cf. **Isa. 14:11**), and the ill-fate of the other person has no further ill-consequences. Therefore, Job finds that the postulate of the doctrine of retribution—that the evildoer, though prosperous for a while, receives his just reward in death—fails to withstand scrutiny. Moreover, Job is reasoning that tragedy has been his fate regardless of his faithful adherence to God's way. That is, **the validity of his moral integrity stands apart from his tragic circumstances**. If that is true, his case must be tried on grounds other than the appearance of his afflicted body. Such is the search Job has undertaken.

2. (:27-33) No Denying the Counter Examples of the Prosperity of the Wicked

Tremper Longman: Job then turns his attention directly to his friends with whom he is debating. He informs them that he is aware that their intentions are not to console, but to harm. They are plotting to do him in.

David Clines: In his assault on the doctrine of retribution Job has now argued

- that the wicked do not live unhappy lives, as the doctrine teaches (**vv 7–13**),
- that their godlessness goes unpunished (**vv 14–18**),
- that the apparent invalidity of the doctrine of retribution cannot be evaded by arguing that it is the descendants of the evildoer who suffer (**vv 19–21**),
- and that even if the doctrine were true it would be irrelevant to most of human life, since everyone has a common fate in death (**vv 22–26**).
- Now he asks where the evidence comes from for this traditional doctrine, and whether the testimony of those with experience of life does not point altogether in the opposite direction.

a. (:27-28) Demand for Empirical Examples of the Prosperity of the Wicked

*"Behold, I know your thoughts,
And the plans by which you would wrong me.
28 For you say, 'Where is the house of the nobleman,
And where is the tent, the dwelling places of the wicked?'"*

Tremper Longman: The implication is that they are asking for **empirical proof** for his arguments: “*Show us the house of the wicked!*” The friends have claimed that the house, property, and wealth of the wicked are ephemeral at best (Zophar in **20:4–29**). So, they ask, show us an example of a wicked person who prospers.

Job responds by saying that the examples are obvious and known by all. Just ask those “who pass by on the road,” roughly equivalent to our expression, “Ask the person on the street.” Don’t they see it? **It is obvious.**

David Guzik: Both Job and his friends didn’t understand God’s ways. Yet there were two significant differences between Job and his friends. First, his friends confidently claimed that they did understand, while Job admitted his perplexity. Second, for Job’s friends, these were matters of theological and moral theory and interesting topics for discussion; for the severely suffering Job, these were life-and-death questions.

John Hartley: By their schemes Job has in mind more intricate arguments designed to discredit his argument further. Job thus charges his friends with using their shrewdest reasoning to harm rather than to help him.

- b. (:29) Depositions from Qualified Witnesses
 *“Have you not asked wayfaring men,
 And do you not recognize their witness?”*

Francis Andersen: Zophar had airily appealed to universal knowledge (**20:4**). Job retorts that he cannot have been around much. Any traveler could tell him that things are just the opposite of what he says.

John Hartley: These passersby are *wayfarers* who have the opportunity to observe many situations in various lands (cf. **Lam. 1:12; 2:15; Ps. 80:13 [Eng. 12]**). As they travel about they relate the unusual things they have seen. Their **wide experience** offers them a **broad perspective** on the general state of human affairs. Perhaps Job has a tolerant attitude toward the information given by travelers, as is found in Ben Sira: “A much traveled man knows many things” (Sir. 34:9a, JB). Previously Eliphaz had rejected the idea that strangers could give any information to the truly wise (**15:18–19**), but Job is renouncing such a position as myopic thinking intended to protect his theology from being challenged by any evidence to the contrary. The testimony from travelers, however, will confirm that affairs are just as Job has described them, particularly regarding the prosperous wicked. These travelers have observed that the evil man is spared in the day of calamity [*’ēḏ*], known also as the day of wrath (*’abārôt*). Job is saying that travelers have seen the houses of the noble wicked still standing after a natural disaster.

- c. (:30-33) Demonstrations Disproving Doctrine of Retribution
 - 1) (:30-31) No Observable Accountability in This Life

*“For the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity;
They will be led forth at the day of fury.
Who will confront him with his actions,
And who will repay him for what he has done?”*

Tremper Longman: In **v. 30** he again states the obvious (at least to him): evil people are spared calamity. They are not recipients of divine wrath; they are kept safe. The world is topsy-turvy. No one, neither God nor people, confronts them with their evil ways (**v. 31a**). And certainly no one, again neither God nor people, punishes them for what they have done (**v. 31b**).

John Hartley: vv. 31-33 -- Continuing with a double rhetorical question, Job claims that when such an evil person vaunts himself or exercises his authority, no one is brave enough to withstand that person to his face. God has not established any authority on earth powerful enough to repay such an evildoer for what he has done. As a result, when he dies he is given a **dignified burial**, even though he has lived his life as wantonly as he pleased. With great pomp he is borne to the cemetery and interred in a beautiful sepulcher. An honorable funeral was one of the highest honors a community could pay its most respected citizens. Over his tomb (*gāḏiṣ*) a servant keeps watch (*šāqad*), i.e., in the succeeding years that servant tends the yard and protects the sepulcher from damage. He also takes care of the rites honoring the deceased. In many ancient Near Eastern countries the rich made endowments to ensure the proper care of their tombs. This custom was designed to guarantee the continuation of the honor of the deceased. The tomb here is pictured as being in a wadi. The caves along the walls of a dry riverbed offer excellent burial sites. There the *clods* that cover the dead person's body are sweet, suggesting that their occupant **rests in peace**. His glorious grave honors him. This picture discounts the rhetoric of Bildad (**18:13–21**) and Zophar (**20:20–29**) about the woeful end of the wicked. Everyone in attendance at his funeral will eventually follow him in death, just as he has joined the countless number that have preceded him. In Job's view “inequity obtains even in death” (**Habel**, OTL). Thus Job rejects the corollary of the doctrine of retribution that death preempts the joys and successes of the wicked.

2) (:32-33) No Dishonor in Burial

*“While he is carried to the grave,
Men will keep watch over his tomb.
The clods of the valley will gently cover him;
Moreover, all men will follow after him,
While countless ones go before him.”*

Francis Andersen: Far from an ignominious death, with no memorial (Bildad in **chapter 18**, Zophar in **chapter 20**), the wicked ends his life with a flourish: a sumptuous funeral, accompanied by vast crowds, a lavish tomb, all the marks of honour and respect.

Tremper Longman: Verses 32–33 again emphasize that even the death of wicked people is blessed. They are cared for in death, buried, and watched over (a fact that aggravates Qohelet; **Eccles. 8:10**). They are happy in their burial, and they are surrounded by people who come out to their grave and pay their respects.

3. (:34) Mike Drop = Counsel of the Mockers Has Been Refuted

*“How then will you vainly comfort me,
For your answers remain full of falsehood?”*

Francis Andersen: In a parting shot (**21:34**) Job says that their words are empty and false. They can keep on mocking if they like (**verse 3b**), for that is what their comfort amounts to.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was this Doctrine of Retribution more of a theological quandary in the OT economy where the blessings for covenant loyalty were often more physical and material in nature?
- 2) Why is there no positive movement on the part of Job’s counsellors to adjust their thinking based on the arguments put forth?
- 3) How must God’s justice be evaluated from the standpoint of eternity rather than measured against just experiences in this life?
- 4) How do Job’s arguments serve as a refutation of the Prosperity Gospel of today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: The second cycle of speeches ends with Job’s complete rejection of the doctrine of retribution as presented by the friends. He delivers a discourse to prove that the premise that the wicked receive just rewards in this life by suffering an early death or by having misfortune befall their households does not stand before the evidence of the actual state of affairs on earth. He shows that there are evildoers who are secure, enjoying their prosperity. They live a rich life, full of blessing, even though they deny God. Their experience proves that “there is such a thing as blessedness without blessing, divine favor without God, salvation without a saviour!” In fact, those who do evil blatantly are interred with a pompous funeral given for the noblest members of the community. They die in glory with respect, not in shame. Job finds that these case histories contradict the tenets of the doctrine of retribution. So at the close of the second cycle of speeches Job soundly rejects the teaching of the friends.

David Thompson: Job's friends had **deranged theology**. They assumed that if Job were right with God he would be healthy and wealthy, because the wicked people aren't healthy and wealthy.

Well Job says look around. It is a major mistake of theology to think that righteous people will always be those who prosper, who are happy, and who will experience a life of ease without turmoil and suffering. Truth is there is a good chance righteous people will suffer the most on this earth and may actually have the least. Job was tired of listening to these men present their distorted theological assumptions so in this section, he decides to fight fire with fire.

He has been blasted by Zophar and in this text Job says: IT IS FALSE DOCTRINE TO ALWAYS ASSUME THAT A BELIEVER IS SUFFERING BECAUSE HE IS WICKED; FOR WHEN YOU LOOK AT WICKED PEOPLE YOU WILL SEE THAT THEY TYPICALLY PROSPER AND DON'T SUFFER LIKE SOME FAITHFUL BELIEVERS SUFFER.

Frankly, wicked people most times have much more prosperity and success and much more of a pain-free lifestyle than those godly. God did not promise the wicked would suffer on earth; He said those who live godly will suffer on earth.

Clarke: This chapter may be called Job's triumph over the insinuated calumnies, and specious but false doctrines, of his opponents. The irritability of his temper no longer appears: from the time he got that glorious discovery of his Redeemer, and the joyous hope of an eternal inheritance, **Job 19:25**, etc., we find no more murmurings, nor unsanctified complainings. He is now full master of himself, and reasons conclusively, because he reasons coolly.

Warren Wiersbe: After appealing once more for their understanding and sympathy (:1-6), Job replied to Zophar's statements and refuted each of them. Job stated that, from his point of view, it appears that the wicked have long lives (vv. 7-16), they are not often sent calamity (vv. 17-21), and the death of the wicked is no different from the death of other men (vv. 22-34). Point by point, Job took Zophar's speech and shredded it into bits.

Derek Kidner: One would expect the wicked to be punished, but it is Job whom God has struck (21:9; cf. 19:21; 9:34). And Job is troubled by it. Why? Because he still believes that God is in control, inflicting his punishment on Job (21:9). And, what is more, it is God who lies behind the wicked's prosperity: "*Their prosperity is not in their own hands*" (21:16). Deep down, despite the seeming chaos, Job does not abandon his belief that God is in control of all that happens. Despite all his arguments, it is the secret of his calmness, his "patience" or perseverance. No matter how rich and secure the wicked may be, Job will have none of it. Even in his misery Job would not exchange places with the wicked – not for all their riches!

TEXT: Job 22:1-30

TITLE: ELIPHAZ'S THIRD SPEECH – TURN AND BE RESTORED

BIG IDEA:

CALL TO REPENTANCE TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: The **function** of the speech seems to be ultimately to encourage Job to believe in a future restoration to his wealth and status. But before he offers such encouragement, Eliphaz first attempts to disabuse Job of some misconceptions he believes he holds, such as the idea that God's punishment is due to some loss God fears he suffers when humans sin and the idea of Job that he is perfectly innocent and undeserving of any suffering at all. . .

The **nodal verse**, it may be suggested, is **v 23**: "*If you will turn to the Almighty, you will be restored*"—for here the advice of Eliphaz, and thus the whole purpose of his intervention in the dialogue, is put in a nutshell.

Tremper Longman: He begins by granting the possibility that Job might be, as he claims, a good person (**vv. 2–3**). He says, even so, it does not matter. God receives no benefits from such people. However, he is unconvinced that Job really is pious. After all, God is reproving him, so it is obvious that he is evil, not good. At this point, Eliphaz starts listing Job's sins (**vv. 4–9**) to make sense of his suffering (**vv. 10–11**). However, he charges Job with saying that the exalted God is so distant that he does not know what is going on in the world (**vv. 12–14**), thus showing that he is just one of the wicked who will suffer for their sins, leading the righteous to rejoice (**vv. 15–20**). Finally, and not surprisingly, Eliphaz calls on Job to repent and thus be restored in his relationship with God and also in his prosperity (**vv. 21–30**).

John Hartley: In his third speech Eliphaz forthrightly accuses Job of violating the high standards of patriarchal piety. Then he disputes Job's complaint that the wicked prosper and never are punished by instructing him as to how God actually treats the wicked. Eliphaz concludes by delivering a stirring call for Job to repent. Thus this speech is composed of three sections:

- accusations against Job (**vv. 1–11**);
- a disputation concerning God's activity in human affairs (**vv. 12–24**);
- and a call to repentance (**vv. 21–30**).

Francis Andersen: If Eliphaz had not misjudged Job (**22:5**), his proclamation of salvation through forgiveness of the penitent would have been the brightest word that

any of the friends have said. As such they have an intrinsic truth that need not be denied. If Job does not accept them it is because they do not apply.

(:1) PROLOGUE – RESPONSE OF ELIPHAZ

“Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,”

I. (:2-11) SUFFERING IS DESERVED BECAUSE OF SOCIAL SINS

A. (:2-5) Labeling Job a Great Sinner

1. (:2-3) Human Behavior Can’t Benefit God

a. (:2) Man’s Wisdom of No Value to God

*“Can a vigorous man be of use to God,
Or a wise man be useful to himself?”*

David Thompson: Eliphaz is basically saying – Job, you aren’t of any use to anybody. Job was no use to God or himself. Job had made himself wise, but the wisdom of Job was self-invented and it was of no use to anybody. This is a way of saying Job, you are **good for nothing**.

John Hartley: In disbelief at Job’s holding on to his innocence so obstinately and disturbed at his bold complaints against God, Eliphaz seeks to demonstrate to Job the fallacy in his reasoning. He wishes to refute Job’s implication from his disputation that since there are wicked people who enjoy prosperity all their lives there may be righteous people who endure calamity in spite of their righteousness (**ch. 21**). Eliphaz counters this position with the premise that a person cannot benefit God. For emphasis, in the MT *God* comes first in the question. The words he uses for man refer to his strength (*geber*; cf. **3:3**) and his skill in wisdom (*maškil*). Heb. *maškil* means to have insight (**Prov. 1:3**), to act prudently (**Ps. 14:3; Prov. 19:14**), and to succeed (**1 Sam. 18:14, 15**). It is used here because it characterizes the person as both righteous and successful. Eliphaz is arguing that the strongest among mankind is not able to do anything **that puts God under obligation**, not even when he acts wisely in reconciling himself with God. This means then that **misfortune can have its cause only in human sin**, never in God’s sovereign purpose acting toward an individual irrespective of his righteousness or wickedness. In other words it is unfathomable to Eliphaz that God would permit a righteous person to endure a season of misery even though he has been faithful in obeying God. He, therefore, cannot perceive that Job could get anywhere by seeking to find reconciliation with God (cf. **9:33–34; 16:19; 19:25**). His hope is groundless, for a wise person has no advantage with God to demand that God respond to him in a certain way.

David Clines: **vv. 2-5** -- Eliphaz’s logic takes some fathoming, mainly because there are a couple of elements in it that remain only implicit. But this seems to be what he means: God stands to gain nothing from human behavior, for how can a deity be affected one way or the other by how his creatures behave? So if he brings suffering upon a human, we need not look to God for any explanation of its reasons, as if God had something to

gain or lose. The only explanation for human suffering must lie in the humans themselves; “*the root of the matter*” lies there (19:28). And, since God is not immoral, he cannot be making a human like Job suffer for his piety; if Job is suffering, it can only be for his impiety. The **implicit elements** assumed by Eliphaz’s argument are these:

(1) Not only is it no gain to God if Job is innocent; it is no loss either if he is wicked.

(2) Suffering is always in proportion to wickedness; great suffering presupposes great wickedness, and temporary suffering presupposes wickedness that can be repented of and eradicated.

b. (:3) Man’s Righteousness of No Value to God

*“Is there any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous,
Or profit if you make your ways perfect?”*

David Thompson: Eliphaz is basically saying to Job that he thinks a lot of himself and his righteousness, but it doesn’t mean a thing to God. Eliphaz is saying **God does not need you**. God does not need your righteousness. You are of no profit to Him, even though you think you are so righteous and complete.

Elmer Smick: A translation that fits well into the context might be: “*Would it please the Almighty if you were vindicated? / Would he gain anything if you did live a blameless life?*” Two observations are in order.

- First, Eliphaz does not know of God’s contest with the Accuser over Job’s former, blameless life. The Almighty has especially chosen Job to be an instrument through whom he will gain glory and the Accuser be humiliated.
- Second, Eliphaz seems so convinced of Job’s wickedness—even to the point of exaggeration (v.5)—that he does not believe Job can be vindicated. So in his mind Job’s blamelessness is hypothetical nonsense. For Job to be vindicated would be a lie; so how could God take pleasure in that?

2. (:4-5) Great Judgment Must Be in Response to Great Wickedness

a. (:4) Judgment Not Due to Piety

*“Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you,
That He enters into judgment against you?”*

Tremper Longman: He has above suggested that God would not even care if Job were blameless, but now he will not even concede his blamelessness as a possibility. Job’s suffering demonstrates sufficiently to him that Job is a man who is enduring divine reproof. He snidely asks Job whether he thinks that this reproof is a result of his “*fear*.” The fear to which he refers is the **fear of God**, which is the mark of a pious person (Prov. 1:7). The mere fact of Job’s suffering is a sure sign that he is under the judgment of God; and if he is under the judgment of God, he certainly is not blameless. On the contrary, his evil nature is manifest to everyone (v. 5).

b. (:5) Judgment Must Be Due to Wickedness

*“Is not your wickedness great,
And your iniquities without end?”*

Francis Andersen: Eliphaz now openly brands Job a sinner more bluntly than anyone has so far dared to do. He accuses him of extreme wickedness. The list of crimes enumerated in **verses 6–9** is very revealing. None have to do with religion in the formal sense. Job is not charged with any failure in his duty to God, nor is he blamed for having done anything wrong. To that extent, Eliphaz can still find no flaw in Job’s conduct. Instead, he tests a person’s goodness by the way he treats his fellow-man. The acts Eliphaz describes are not elicited by legal or even moral obligation. Here, too, Job had never failed. For superlative righteousness, a person should be humane towards the needy, not from duty, but from compassion. The destitute were protected from neglect and exploitation (6) by **Exodus 22:26f.; Deuteronomy 24:10ff.** Job later denies any failure here (**31:19**). The hungry and thirsty (7) should be succoured. Job insists that he did this (**31:17**). A woman or child left without the protection of a man (the terms are wider than widow and orphan) (9) are constantly commended to the compassion of the Israelite, especially of rulers (**Deut. 10:18; 14:29; etc.**), and their neglect is condemned again and again in the Old Testament as the worst social evil (**Exod. 22:22; Deut. 27:19; etc.**). Once more Job is innocent (**31:16f.**).

Elmer Smick: vv. 4-11 -- Job’s sins are described in terms of social oppression and neglect. In other words, Eliphaz feels that Job has deceived himself by trusting in his ritual piety (what he had done for God), while his real sin is what he has failed to do for his other people. For this God has sent snares and peril, darkness and floods (vv.10–11). These are not literal but commonly used figures of trouble and distress in the OT (cf. **Pss 42:7; 91:3–6; Isa 8:7, 22; 43:2**). That these charges are not true and that Job’s suffering is not a result of such sins is clear. In **chapter 31** Job himself recounts his past in such a way as to undermine Eliphaz’s assertions (see esp. **31:16–23, 32–33**).

John Hartley: A complete turnabout has taken place in Eliphaz’s attitude toward Job. In the first speech Eliphaz praised Job for his righteousness and piety (**4:3–4**). He supposed that Job was suffering misfortune merely for a **brief time** while God was seeking to lead Job to repent of some hidden sin. He hoped that with encouragement Job would find restoration to divine favor through repentance. But Job has persisted in his obstinate claim of innocence. Since Job appears to be as recalcitrant as a hardened sinner, Eliphaz has reached the end of his patience. Shamed by his friend’s stubbornness before the obvious divine displeasure, he seeks to convince Job that he is guilty of grievous sins. In fact, he concludes that there is no end to Job’s iniquities (*‘awōnōt*).

David Clines: He does not adopt Zophar’s view, that God is not even punishing Job as much as he deserves (**11:6**); he simply reasons that if Job is suffering badly, he must have offended badly. If Job does not allow that his suffering is as great as his deserts, he must be overlooking some of his faults. Eliphaz’s self-imposed duty then is to bring to Job’s attention areas of his life in which Job must have been defective.

B. (:6-9) Leveling Specific Charges against Job = Social Sins

1. (:6) Financial Exploitation

*“For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause,
And stripped men naked.”*

2. (:7) Failure to Show Compassion to the Afflicted

*“To the weary you have given no water to drink,
And from the hungry you have withheld bread.”*

(:8) Aside: You Have Failed to Act as a Powerful and Honorable Man

*“But the earth belongs to the mighty man,
And the honorable man dwells in it.”*

L. M. Grant: In **verse 8** Eliphaz is apparently charging that Job in the past as a mighty man possessed the land, dwelling in it as though he was honourable. But according to the principles of Eliphaz, Job must have been guilty of oppressing the widows and the fatherless.

3. (:9) Failure to Care for Widows and Orphans

*“You have sent widows away empty,
And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.”*

John Hartley: The sins mentioned include:

- economic abuse of the poor,
- refusal of help to the afflicted, and
- lack of compassion for the bereaved.

C. (:10-11) Listing Consequences of Divine Judgment = Job’s Suffering

1. (:10a) Trapped

“Therefore snares surround you,”

2. (:10b) Terrified

“And sudden dread terrifies you,”

3. (:11a) Blinded

“Or darkness, so that you cannot see,”

4. (:11b) Overwhelmed

“And an abundance of water covers you.”

John Hartley: The light by which Job has lived has turned to darkness so that he can no longer see clearly. The swelling waters (*šip ‘at-mayim*) that devastate the landscape are rising over him. About to cover him, they are threatening to sweep him away. Cold, dark, swelling waters frequently symbolize the unrelenting emotional pressure of despair (**Jon. 2:6 [Eng. 5]; Ps. 69:2–3 [Eng. 1–2]**). Before his death the sinner gets a

foretaste of Sheol, noted both for its watery chaos and for the shadowy, meager life that has to be eked out in dreary darkness. Eliphaz is saying that Job is suffering the curses of God's judgment for his sins.

II. (:12-20) DIVINE JUDGMENT ALWAYS TARGETS THE WICKED

David Clines: In this section of the speech, Eliphaz continues his suppositions about Job's sins that have brought him into the present straits. Whereas in vv 6–9 he had alleged particular misdemeanors against Job, here he attributes to him a general attitude of godlessness that he must assume if he is to account for God's present punishment of Job. But the speech loses its way a little in the middle of this section; for by v 16 Eliphaz has lost sight of Job and has begun to expatiate yet again on the fate of the wicked in general. And in v 17 the words of the wicked, "*Depart from us,*" are not in any way ascribed to Job himself, while the scornful laugh of the righteous at the discomfiture of the wicked has even less to do with the case of Job himself.

A. (:12-14) Don't Question God's Concern for Moral Behavior

1. (:12) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Care

"Is not God in the height of heaven?

Look also at the distant stars, how high they are!"

John Hartley: Eliphaz turns abruptly from accusing Job to instructing him about God's punishment of the wicked. He begins by quoting a hymnic line in praise of God's exaltedness (v. 12) to counter Job's supposed position that God lacks knowledge about what happens on earth (vv. 13–14). God is most high. Whoever observes the heavens is awed by the vastness of the universe and the great distance of the stars, especially the dense Milky Way. But God is more distant than even the farthest stars. Because he is so transcendent, there can be no doubt that he is the exalted Lord of the universe.

Tremper Longman: Eliphaz reminds Job that God is exalted. He is even above the highest stars, and they are themselves exalted. One would think that from that vantage point, God would see everything, and indeed Eliphaz believes so. However, he suspects that Job does not. After all, Job is wicked and thought he could get away with his crimes. He attributes to Job the belief that the clouds between the heavens and the earth prevent God from seeing what is going on in the world. God cannot discern the goings-on and judge the actions of people he cannot see. Job thinks, according to Eliphaz, that God keeps himself up in the vaults of heaven, pacing about with no interest or ability to interact with human affairs (vv. 13–14).

2. (:13) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Know or See

"And you say, 'What does God know?

Can He judge through the thick darkness?'"

Francis Andersen: Eliphaz thinks that Job has charged God with **moral indifference to the conduct of wicked men**, saying, '*What does God know?*' (verse 13). This alleged

quotation is not found in any of Job's reported words. Job has never questioned God's knowledge. But it seems to Eliphaz that Job feels that God doesn't care. Eliphaz is shocked at the idea, and is genuinely alarmed for the spiritual safety of a person who can say such a thing.

3. (:14) Transcendence of God Doesn't Mean He Doesn't Stay Involved

*"Clouds are a hiding place for Him, so that He cannot see;
And He walks on the vault of heaven."*

John Hartley: From the ancient perspective, when God created the universe, he drew a circle to hold back the heavenly waters from covering the earth (**Prov. 8:27**). His abode is located above this circle. There thick clouds surround him so that the heavenly creatures are not consumed by his glory (cf. **Ps. 97:2**). But according to Eliphaz, Job misconstrues this affirmation about God. He thinks that this dark cloud serves as a dense barrier which keeps God from seeing and judging affairs on earth (cf. **Job 9:22–24**). Job's supposed position contrasts with that of the devout person who reasons that God's exalted position affords him a great vantage point from which to view all the activities of mankind (**Isa. 40:22–23; Ps. 33:13–15**). The devout believe that from his lofty dwelling God immediately can thwart the plans of any leader that threaten his purpose for mankind.

Eliphaz fears that a right view of God's transcendence has led Job to a wrong position regarding God's immanence and his constant influence in events on earth. In Eliphaz's opinion Job's view is heretical, being close to what is classified today as modern deism or practical atheism: God created the world but has left it to its own course. For Eliphaz this view of God is faulty, being far too inadequate for an orthodox faith. Therefore, without a radical change in his belief in God, Job has little hope of escaping the ultimate punishment of death. But Eliphaz has not correctly heard Job's complaints. If he had listened more carefully, he would have heard that it is not Job's concern that God is not active in affairs on earth, but that it seems from appearances that God judges the wicked erratically and capriciously. Sadly, Eliphaz is charging Job with heretical thoughts by over-interpreting his sincere complaints against God.

B. (:15-17) Don't Follow in the Footsteps of Wicked Men in the Past

1. (:15-16) Remember the Catastrophic Judgments on the Wicked in the Past

*"Will you keep to the ancient path
Which wicked men have trod,
Who were snatched away before their time,
Whose foundations were washed away by a river?"*

John Hartley: By establishing an analogy between Job's punishment and those past catastrophes, he identifies Job as the same kind of reprobate as those whom God abandoned to their evil imaginations (cf. **Gen. 6:5–8**). Therefore, he finds that Job is more than deserving of his present plight.

2. (:17) Remember the Arrogant Independent Spirit of the Wicked

*“They said to God, 'Depart from us!'
And 'What can the Almighty do to them?’”*

John Hartley: Eliphaz points out that evil men who believe that God is too distant to observe affairs on earth pursue their evil plans without any fear of divine reprisals (cf. **Ezek. 8:12**).

C. (:18-20) Don’t End Up Being Mocked by the Righteous as You Are Judged

1. (:18) Retribution Theology

*“Yet He filled their houses with good things;
But the counsel of the wicked is far from me.”*

2. (:19-20) Righteous Gloating over the Destruction of the Wicked

*“The righteous see and are glad,
And the innocent mock them,
20 Saying, 'Truly our adversaries are cut off,
And their abundance the fire has consumed.’”*

John Hartley: To heighten his argumentation and to prepare for the coming exhortation to repentance Eliphaz describes the enthusiastic reaction of the righteous to the destruction of the wicked. The righteous see their ruin and rejoice. They even participate in the punishment of the wicked by mocking them. Gleefully pointing to the ashes of their destroyed possession, the innocent will say, their abundance the fire has devoured. All that they had accumulated as the proof of their power and as the basis of their prestige will be consumed. Nothing will survive them as a memorial. In addition, the survival of the righteous will stand as proof that these wicked people have brought this harsh fate on themselves.

Tremper Longman: He finishes this section of his argument with a quote from the righteous, who gloat over the destruction of the wicked. They are happy that the wicked and their wealth are destroyed by the fires of God’s judgment (**v. 20**).

III. (:21-30) REPENTANCE YIELDS THE POWER OF A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP

Roy Zuck: Eliphaz set forth what Job needed to do:

- a. Submit to God, rather than questioning and accusing Him;
- b. be at (make) peace with Him;
- c. accept God’s teachings (as if Job were not willing to do that!);
- d. assimilate and live out His words;
- e. return to the Almighty;
- f. get rid of wickedness (again assuming that Job was a secret sinner);
- g. quit trusting in wealth (assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir

A. (:21-25) Process of Repentance Yields Abundant Blessing

1. (:21) Relinquish Rebellious Spirit (Submit) and Make Peace with God

*“Yield now and be at peace with Him;
Thereby good will come to you.”*

David Clines: What troubles Eliphaz about Job is, evidently, not that he is a dreadful sinner in imminent danger of annihilation but that he continues a fruitless disputation against God that only prolongs his agony.

2. (:22) Receive Instruction and Apply God’s Word

*“Please receive instruction from His mouth,
And establish His words in your heart.”*

3. (:23a) Return to God and Be Restored

*“If you return to the Almighty,
you will be restored;”*

4. (:23b-25) Remove Sin and Pursue God

*“If you remove unrighteousness far from your tent,
24 And place your gold in the dust,
And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks,
25 Then the Almighty will be your gold
And choice silver to you.”*

John Hartley: With such a gesture a person makes a statement that the wealth of this world has no claims on his affections. Eliphaz is subtly suggesting that Job has secured his treasures from unjust practices, such as extortion. Therefore, for Job to remove iniquity from his tent is for him to get rid of his ill-gotten wealth. His violating the divine teaching in securing this wealth means that he has valued material treasures more than genuine trust in God. Now he must renounce his gold by laying it on the ground.

David Clines: There is more than one way of taking these verses, and it is very revealing of the prejudices of commentators to see what they choose. The prevailing view is that Job is being encouraged by Eliphaz to abandon his trust in material wealth and put his hopes in Shaddai instead. . .

The alternative view, which is to be preferred, is that Job is here being promised by Eliphaz that if he “*returns*” to the Almighty (v 23), he will regain his former wealth. Either he will become so rich that he will regard gold as no less common than dirt (or rather, even more common than dirt or dust, the signifying excess), or else he will “*lay up*” (KJV) his gold like dust in piles as if it were as plentiful as stones in the wadi, or (improbably) he will be so secure that he will be able to leave his gold lying about on the ground without risk of losing it (**Gordis**). The Almighty would then have “*become*” his gold and silver in the sense of having been the provider of it. This is a less “religious” interpretation but a more concrete one; the alternative idea of God becoming Job’s “gold” and “silver” in the sense that Job will esteem God as the highest good is quite banal, since Job has little doubt about the supremacy of the divine. . .

A more serious difficulty with the view that Job should trust in God rather than his wealth is that Job now has no wealth to divest himself of (as Rowley remarks), and in any case Eliphaz himself can hardly envisage Job's restoration as anything other than a restoration of his possessions. What would it mean for Shaddai to "be" Job's silver if no actual wealth is in view? How will Job be able to employ servants again, and how will he manage to pay his vows (v 27) if he lives the life of a penniless pietist?

B. (:26-30) Power of a Restored Relationship

1. (:26) Power of Delighting in God

*"For then you will delight in the Almighty,
And lift up your face to God."*

2. (:27) Power of Prayer and Thanksgiving

*"You will pray to Him, and He will hear you;
And you will pay your vows."*

3. (:28) Power of Guidance and Accomplishment

*"You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you;
And light will shine on your ways."*

John Hartley: Reunited with God, Job will have great spiritual power in order that he may bless others. Since he has God's will at heart, God will bring to pass whatever Job decrees. His dreams and ambitions will no longer be in vain, for God will give him insight into how to proceed in difficult matters. Whatever he does will prosper, for God's light will shine on his ways. This is a direct promise that counters Job's feeling of being lost in darkness (19:8).

4. (:29) Power of Personal Deliverance

*"When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence
And the humble person He will save."*

5. (:30) Power of Intercession to Deliver Others

*"He will deliver one who is not innocent,
And he will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands."*

John Hartley: From his renewed relationship with God, Job will be able to help those who are facing troubles. To the disheartened he may speak an encouraging word: Be lifted up! God will hear his righteous servant's charge and honor it by granting deliverance to the oppressed. Job also will be able to intercede for others, for his prayers will be grounded in his righteous deeds, as symbolized by the phrase the cleanness of your hands. Although one's acts of righteousness do not transfer directly to the account of another, the righteous person does have power to stand in the gap for another. His prayers, coming from a pure heart that is obedient to God, have authority. God acknowledges his prayers and delivers the guilty. While God alone grants them forgiveness, he allows a human being to participate in the process of rescuing that

person. The patriarchs were known for their ability to petition God for mercy in order to avert judgment on the rebellious (cf. **Ezek. 14:12–20**). When Job makes peace with God, he will have the same spiritual power as these great patriarchs.

Tremper Longman: Verses 29–30 conclude with a comment about God’s pattern of deliverance. The principle, according to Eliphaz, is that God saves the humble and the innocent. God humiliates the proud. Eliphaz imagines a chastened Job agreeing with God’s assessment. Right now Job insists that God is humiliating him unfairly. He does not deserve it. In the future, when Job’s heart is set straight, he will accept the divine judgment that he is proud and will humble himself (with downcast eyes). God rescues the innocent, so Eliphaz counsels Job to pay attention to the purity of his acts (hands).

Peter Wallace: There is a delicious **irony** in Eliphaz’s conclusion. “*He delivers even the one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.*” Eliphaz thinks that when Job repents and is restored, then God will use Job to deliver others. Little does he know – that he, Eliphaz, will be one of those “*who is not innocent.*” At the end of the book God will require Eliphaz, to offer sacrifices through the intercession of Job! So finally, Eliphaz is right about something! Job will indeed become the mediator who delivers others through the cleanness of his hands!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) **Does God care** if we live a righteous life and follow His ways?
- 2) How are **passive sins** (like failing to meet the needs of the afflicted) as culpable as active transgressions of God’s law?
- 3) What are some false inferences that people make from the doctrine of the **transcendence of God** and how must we balance our theology with a proper understanding of God’s immanence?
- 4) Where do you see the **power of God** at work in your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Brian Borgman: Eliphaz’s Third Speech (22)

- A. Eliphaz attacks Job’s integrity (22:1-11)
- B. Eliphaz accuses Job of blasphemy (22:12-20)
- C. Eliphaz exhorts Job repent so God can bless him (22:21-30)

Warren Wiersbe: He [Eliphaz] made three serious accusations against Job:

- he is a sinner (**Job 22:1-11**),
- he is hiding his sins (**vv. 12-20**),
- and he must confess his sins and repent before God can help him (**vv. 21-30**).

John Hartley: Since Job refuses to bend from his claim of innocence and God continues to punish him, Eliphaz feels compelled to convince Job that he has indeed sinned and that he can have his relationship with God restored. Therefore, he blatantly accuses Job of specific deeds of wrongdoing. Since no one has endured such severe loss and pain as Job has, he must have sinned boldly. Eliphaz concludes that he has violated the standards of patriarchal religion by abusing the weak and unfortunate. He is thus deserving of every painful moment of his trial.

At this point Eliphaz makes his greatest mistake. Pressed to defend God's honor, he condemns Job. Fearing that Job's view of God has led him into arrogant sins, Eliphaz accuses Job of practical atheism—the belief that God is so distant that it does not matter to him what human beings do on earth. . .

Having some hope for Job, Eliphaz exhorts him to **repent**. To motivate Job he lists the **privileges** that attend repentance: reconciliation, prosperity, wisdom, joyful living, security, power in prayer, authority in intercession. Eliphaz wants Job to focus on God alone as the source of his wealth and joy. From such singleness of heart comes great spiritual power. These words regarding repentance are insightful and may be proclaimed as a part of God's word. There is one major caution: a call to repentance loses its power when it is offered from inaccurate perceptions and wrong motivations. As **Delitzsch** says, "Even the holiest and truest words lose their value when they are not uttered at the right time, and the most brilliant sermon that exhorts to penitence remains without effect when it is prompted by pharisaic uncharitableness." . . .

A study of the movement of Eliphaz's rhetoric in his three speeches reveals the tension that exists between what one believes and the course of earthly affairs. Unfortunately Eliphaz is unable to hold this tension in balance. His care for Job hardens into condemnation because he feels he has to protect his cherished beliefs from Job's charges. Concern for his beliefs leads him to reprove Job instead of sharing Job's burden. As a result, his rhetoric dampens the dynamic of Job's faith and increases the pain of Job's struggle with undeserved suffering. Let us hope that the example of Eliphaz will awaken us to practice our faith by acting compassionately toward the weak and the suffering, not by trying to force them into a set, dogmatic mold that would turn them from God rather than to God.

David Thompson: **vv. 12-18 – Eliphaz attacks Job's theology –**

Now Eliphaz starts making up things about God that he says Job believes, which Job has never believed or said. Now notice how he begins this—with his high and holy perspective of God (**22:12**). **J. Oswald Chambers** said Pharisees often don't touch reality. This all sounds so pious, so real, so true, but look at this:

(Theological Claim #1) - Eliphaz claims Job verbally attacked God's knowledge. **22:13**
Eliphaz claims Job said God doesn't know what is going on. What Job is doing is like a thick darkness that is beyond God's ability to know and judge.

(Theological Claim #2) - Eliphaz claims Job verbally attacked God's omnipresence.
22:14

Eliphaz claims God cannot see what is happening. He is high up in heaven and He cannot see.

(Theological Claim #3) - Eliphaz claims Job is on a wicked path of dismissing God from his life. **22:15-18**

God has done good things for Job even though he is wicked and even though he doesn't want God anywhere around him. Job is just walking down the ancient path of the wicked who could care less about God and don't realize God is the one who has done good things for them.

This is all a lie. Job never said or did any of these things!

Derek Kidner: Eliphaz has not become personal. Gone are the niceties of formal debate. Job is a great sinner! Agreeing with Satan, Job's three friends accuse him of being a hypocrite. God's champion, the one in whom God's grace had been so evidently exhibited, in point of fact belongs to the devil. God cannot possibly be punishing Job for his "piety" (**22:4**). It has to be, therefore, because Job is a sinner – a great sinner! The sooner Job admits it, the better. Job had better stop thinking that in some way he is something special in God's eyes and own up to the fact that he is a sinner.

TEXT: Job 23:1-17

TITLE: *JOB'S THIRD REPLY TO ELIPHAZ – THE TENSION OF FAITH --
CONFIDENCE BUT FRUSTRATION*

BIG IDEA:

**CONFIDENCE IN PERSONAL INTEGRITY FORTIFIES FAITH IN GOD'S
SOVEREIGN WORKING DESPITE THE FRUSTRATION OF PERPLEXING
SUFFERING**

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: In his first speech of the third cycle Job ignores the friends. With great **confidence** he focuses his attention on arguing the merits of his case to God. Then he delivers a long complaint, claiming that the righteous do not see the times of judgment that God is supposed to set for the wicked. These two sections are a statement of confidence (**23:1–17**), and a complaint about unjust social conditions (**24:1–25**).

Tremper Longman: Job's response to Eliphaz takes the form of an expression of desire to encounter God and deal with him directly. After stating the depth of his depression over the matter, he then articulates his wish to find and talk with God (**vv. 2–5**). His speech is filled with conflicting emotions and thoughts. In **vv. 6–7**, for instance, he believes that God would receive his admonitions well and not bully him. As he thinks about it more and recognizes his inability thus far to find God, his attitude takes a turn for the worse. He says he cannot find God anywhere, but if God chooses to find him, then he will set God straight (**vv. 8–10**). The idea of meeting with God terrifies him (**vv. 13–16**), though he also believes that his obedience has been stellar (**vv. 11–12**). In spite of his fear, he ends with determination even in the light of the danger (**v. 17**). This speech thus fits in with other times when Job wrestles with his desire to meet with God (**9:11–24, 32–35; 16:19–22; 19:23–27; 31:35–37**). He believes that this is the only way he has to go forward. At times he thinks it will be helpful, and at other times he reveals a more resigned attitude that such a meeting will be fruitless.

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

Adam Clarke: Job answers; apologizes for his complaining; wishes to plead his cause in the presence of his Maker, from whom he knows he should receive justice; but regrets that he cannot find him, **1-9**. He, however, gives himself and his cause up to God, with the conviction of his own innocence, and God's justice and goodness, **10-14**. He is, nevertheless, afraid when he considers the majesty of his Maker, **15-17**.

Mason: Job's strongest assertions of faith seem always to be coupled with equally strong assertions of fear and pain. In this chapter his confidence in his own

righteousness is more unassailable than ever, yet at the same time ‘thick darkness covers’ his face and he is filled with dread. Somehow Job’s faith is elastic enough to embrace simultaneously both terror and confidence.

John Gill: This and the following chapter contain Job's reply to the last oration of Eliphaz; in this he first declares his present sorrowful estate and condition, **Job 23:1**; wishes he knew where to find God, as a judge sitting on a throne, before whom he might lay his cause, and plead it, and have his judgment and final decision passed upon it; when he doubted not but he would deal favourably with him, and both admit him and strengthen him, to plead his own cause, and would acquit him forever from the charges laid against him, **Job 23:3**; in order to which he sought for him everywhere, but could not find him, but contents himself with this, that God knew his way; and that, after trial of him, he should shine like pure gold, and appear to be no apostate from him, but one sincerely obedient to his commands, and a true lover of his word, **Job 23:8**; and as for his afflictions, they were the result of the unalterable purposes and appointments of God: but what gave him the greatest uneasiness was, that there were more of that sort yet to come, which filled him with fears and faintings, with trouble and darkness.

David Clines: The **nodal verses** of the speech are two: “*Oh that I knew how I might find him*” (**23:3**) and “*Why are days of assize not kept by the Almighty?*” (**24:1**). On these two key sentences, each in headline position, hangs the whole matter of the speech, its first half concerned with **Job’s fruitless quest for justice for himself**, and the second with the **evidences of God’s failure to keep order in the moral universe**.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB REPLIES ONCE AGAIN

“Then Job replied,”

I. (:2-7) MY CASE DESERVES A FAIR HEARING BEFORE GOD

Francis Andersen: Here Job’s courageous honesty is seen at its best. His consuming desire is to come face to face with God (**3**), not by a contrived penance, as Eliphaz recommends, but in fair trial (**4**). Job has abandoned his earlier hesitation and self-mistrust (**9:14–20, 32; 13:18**). He is now confident that he will be able to state his case persuasively (**4**). He is confident of acquittal (**7**). He is prepared to answer charges (**5**; cf. **13:22**). Earlier, when everyone had been emphasizing the infinite power of God, Job had dreaded such a meeting, even while he was demanding it. Fully aware that God is ‘*not a man*’ (**9:32**), he expected to be paralyzed with terror (**9:34; 13:21**) when it was his turn to speak. Behind this anxiety lay an even more shattering thought. What if the difference between God and man is so great that each has a different moral code and Job finds that there is no common ground to argue on? The friends’ songs in praise of God’s justice, instead of making Job feel guilty, have had the opposite effect. Now he is certain that he is in the right (**7a**: the key word of **Job 1:1**), and equally sure that God will not take unfair advantage of his superior strength (**6a**), but will give him a fair

hearing (6b). The acquittal he expects is not the pardon of a guilty man by grace, but the vindication of a righteous man by law.

Tremper Longman: Often Job and the friends begin a speech with an insult or two directed at their opponents. Job forgoes that here and starts with a statement about his own mental state. He is deeply depressed, evidenced by his frequent and heavy groaning. Thus his complaint toward God and his friends is bitter. Rather than leading to resignation, though, his mental state motivates his desire to come into God's presence. He wants to find God (v. 3) with the purpose of setting him straight (v. 4). Behind his words stands the belief that if he could just find God, he could set God straight (*reprove him*, v. 4). The language continues to be legal, thus suggesting a courtroom setting. He wants to set his case before God. Presumably, this means that he wants to argue for his innocence and that he does not deserve the suffering that he presently experiences.

David Clines: Job launches into a powerful expression of his own urgent desire for a settlement of his dispute with God. There is a compelling mixture here of confidence and despair. He believes that if he could find the occasion to present his case to God he would be given a fair hearing and would emerge triumphant. But he knows also that there is no chance that he can stand in court with God; the wish, "*Oh that I knew where I might find him*" (v 3), is a hopeless one. God cannot be compelled to court, so Job has recognized already (9:19); but neither can any wistfulness or yearning bring about the showdown that Job deserves.

A. (:2) My Complaints Are Not Making Any Difference

1. My Complaints Are Criticized as Rebellion

"Even today my complaint is rebellion;"

2. My Complaints Are Legitimate Due to Severe Suffering

"His hand is heavy despite my groaning."

John Hartley: Ignoring Eliphaz's eloquent call to repentance, Job opens this speech by stating that his complaint is *bitter* (*merî*). His *groanings* (*'anāhâ*; cf. 3:24), evoked by his agony, are so severe that he has to control himself with a heavy hand. His pain is pushing hard against the threshold of his self-control. Job wishes his friends to know that his strong words do not arise from slight discomfort.

David Thompson: Verse 2 is tricky and it may mean one of many things. It is possible Job is responding to these three by saying,

- "Even though I am groaning because of heavy trouble that I am experiencing, all you guys do is view me as a complainer who is in rebellion." In other words, it would not matter what Job said; these three kept saying he was rebellious and a complainer.
- Another possibility is that Job is saying—"I am a bitter complainer and I do rebel against all that has happened because I have experienced all of these negative, heavy things and I did not deserve it."

Both of these interpretations are possible and both were true!

B. (:3-5) My Compulsion Is to Plead My Case in Person

1. (:3) Longing to Find and Approach God

*“Oh that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!”*

John Hartley: Job builds his conviction on the hymnic theme that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne (e.g., **Ps. 89:15 [Eng. 141; 97:2]**).

David Thompson: Eliphaz had challenged Job to turn to God and Job says I would if I could find Him. Most people have a healthy fear of facing God as well as they should. In fact, most people will do whatever they can to dismiss the idea from their minds. Job wanted to appear before God and get to the bottom of this.

2. (:4) Longing to Present My Case

*“I would present my case before Him
And fill my mouth with arguments.”*

3. (:5) Longing to Interact with God’s Responses

*“I would learn the words which He would answer,
And perceive what He would say to me.”*

C. (:6-7) My Confidence Is that the Resolution Would Turn Out Positive

1. (:6) God Would Not Misuse His Power to Dominate Me

*“Would He contend with me by the greatness of His power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me.”*

2. (:7) God Would Listen to Reason and Deliver Me

*“There the upright would reason with Him;
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.”*

John Hartley: In this pericope Job’s confidence both in his innocence and in the possibility of finding a resolution to his plight has reached a new height.

Spurgeon: He has confidence in the Lord that, if he could have an audience with him, God would not use his power against him; but, on the contrary, would strengthen him in order that he might state his case.

David Clines: Such a case would be bound to prevail, Job means to say—not because God is fair but because the case is unassailable. . .

It does not matter, in the end, whether Job is confident of a fair hearing from God or not, for he can set forth his case before him only if he can reach God’s dwelling place—and that is an impossible dream, as Job himself recognized when he started out on this train of thought at the beginning of **v 3**: “*Oh, that I knew how I might find him*” means,

first and last, that there is no chance whatever of finding him and having one's case heard.

II. (:8-12) MY ATTITUDE FLUCTUATES BETWEEN FRUSTRATION AND CONFIDENCE

Elmer Smick: Job is still frustrated, however, over the matter of finding God (cf. v.3). Job cannot find him, though he has searched for him in every direction (vv.8–9). God is absent. Later in 42:5 Job will say, “*But now my eyes have seen you.*” But at this point, though he wrestles with God verbally (as he did in **chs. 7; 10; 13–14; 17**), he has no immediate sense of God's presence or of God's voice communicating with him.

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

A. (:8-9) Attitude of Frustration -- God Remains Hidden so Pleading My Case Is Impossible

1. (:8) Cannot Find Him in Front or Behind

*“Behold, I go forward but He is not there,
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;”*

2. (:9) Cannot Find Him on the Left or the Right

*“When He acts on the left, I cannot behold Him;
He turns on the right, I cannot see Him.”*

John Hartley: He is experiencing God as “**the hidden God.**” The essential issue for him is how he, an afflicted person, can discover God's presence. While God haunts those who try to escape him in order to lead them to an awareness of the truth, he becomes imperceptible to his own in seasons of adversity in order that they may search for him, stretching their faith. God's distancing himself from Job's consciousness reflects his trust in Job. That is, by hiding from Job, he allows Job to assert his innocence as a venture of genuine commitment to God.

B. (:10) Attitude of Confidence -- My Character and Conduct Will Receive the Gold Seal of Divine Approval

1. My Conduct and Suffering Are Fully Known to God

“But He knows the way I take;”

Spurgeon: I shall ask four questions of every man within reach of my voice. *God knoweth the way that you take.*

- I will ask you first: Do you know your own way?
- Secondly: Is it a comfort to you that God knows your way?
- Thirdly: Are you tried in the way?
- And, if so, fourthly: Have you confidence in God as to the result of that trial? Can you say with Job, *‘When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold?’*

2. My Character and Conduct Will Ultimately Be Vindicated

“When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

John Hartley: After lamenting God’s absencing himself, Job states with conviction that God *knows the way that I take*. That is, he is sure that God has full knowledge of all his thoughts and actions. Therefore, he believes that when God has finished testing him, he will come forth purified in character, just as gold is purified by passing through fire. Here Job’s assurance that God is concerned with his well-being rises to its highest point.

Job’s use of the analogy of purifying gold for his own testing is another indication that the basic motivation behind his lament is the restoration of his own honor, not the restoration of his wealth. With this metaphor Job is rebutting Eliphaz’s exhortation to lay aside gold and to make God his gold (**22:24–25**). Rather than owning the precious metal, Job longs for a golden character.

David Guzik: With wonderful faith, Job seemed at this fleeting instant to understand what he could and should in his present crisis. He understood that:

- God still observed Job carefully and had not forgotten him (*He knows the way that I take*).
- God had a purpose in the crisis, and the purpose was not to punish Job (*when He has tested me*).
- God would one day bring the trial to an end (*I shall come forth*).
- God would bring something good from it all (*I shall come forth as gold*).
- God still valued Job; only precious metal is put through the fire (*as gold*).

David Clines: **vv. 10-14** -- The train of thought seems to be this: Despite my desire to find God and present my case to him (**vv 3–7**), I am unable to find him (**vv 8–9**). And he is elusive just because (“*for*,” **v 10**)—although I am a righteous man who has always kept God’s commands (**vv 10–12**)—he is determined to make me suffer as long as he wants (**vv 13–14**). If I were to find him now, and he were to listen to my defense, he would have to admit my innocence, and forthwith desist from his persecution of me; but he is more committed to his plan of harassment than he is to the execution of justice. That is why he will not let me find him. . .

Adam Clarke: He approves of my conduct; my ways please him. He tries me: but, like gold, I shall lose nothing in the fire; I shall come forth more pure and luminous. If that which is reputed to be gold is exposed to the action of a strong fire, if it be genuine, it will lose nothing of its quality, nor of its weight. If it went into the fire gold, it will come out gold; the strongest fire will neither alter nor destroy it. So Job: he went into

this furnace of affliction an innocent, righteous man; he came out the same. His character lost nothing of its value, nothing of its lustre.

David Thompson: There will be times in our lives when we will not be able to figure out just exactly what God is doing. Some God-mocking politician will get elected; some killer will go free; some accident will take someone's life and we will not be able to explain it. At those moments we need to maintain a steadfast confidence in God that says God is watching and God is sovereign and if we remain faithful, God will refine us as pure gold.

When we find ourselves in low moments, we will not find any help or comfort in the immediate circumstances, but our comfort will be found in knowing about God and His Word and about what He does for faithful people in the future.

C. (:11-12) Personal Testimony of Faith and Obedience

1. (:11) Testimony of Obeying God's Ways

*"My foot has held fast to His path;
I have kept His way and not turned aside."*

2. (:12) Testimony of Treasuring God's Word

*"I have not departed from the command of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."*

John Hartley: Job rests his confidence in a redemptive outcome to his trial solidly on his **faithful obedience** to God. He has directed his feet to follow the steps God has laid out for him without any deviation. In other words, he has not departed from God's commandment. The commandment is identified as the teaching that comes directly from God's lips or mouth. In fact, Job states that he has treasured or stored up God's words in his breast. That is, he has ingrained God's teachings deep inside him in order to guide his daily life. God's word hidden in his mind keeps him from sinning (cf. **Ps. 119:11**). With this affirmation Job rejects as meaningless for him Eliphaz's exhortation: *"Receive instruction from his own mouth, and place his words in your heart"* (**22:22**). Since God's word has never departed from his thinking, he has no need to restore it back into his heart. These two verses are to this point Job's boldest assertion of innocence.

III. (:13-17) MY FEAR IS THAT GOD CAN DO WHATEVER HE PLEASES

Tremper Longman: **God does what he wants.** However, after further consideration, Job's optimism concerning a potential and hoped-for audience with God dissipates. He remembers that there is none like God (*"he is unique"*), implying that he makes and lives by his own rules. No one can tell him what to do, not Job or anyone. Whatever he determines concerning Job's fate is a done deal (**v. 14**). Job imagines that there may be ideas in God's mind of which he is not even yet aware. Thus again (**21:6**) Job expresses his **terror of God**. After all, God can do whatever he wants to Job, and there is no one

to turn him back, no mediator (16:21) or umpire (9:33). Job's terror or dread is not the same as the "fear" of God that wisdom literature promotes (see Prov. 1:7; Job 28:28; among many other places). Both emotions recognize that God is all-powerful and in control of the cosmos. Both those who are terrified and those who fear God realize that they are no match for the creator of the universe. The difference between those who dread God and those who fear him comes down to how one responds. **Those who dread God will run away**; not so those who fear him. Even so, Job has no recourse. Though he is depressed and frightened (v. 17b), he will not turn back in his attempt to encounter God and set him straight (v. 17a). He will not be silenced by his terror of God.

John Hartley: Job's self-confidence is tempered by his meditation on God's sovereignty. When Job contemplates God's justice in relationship to his personal obedience of the divine law, he waxes bold and confident. But when his mind turns to the sovereign freedom and majestic holiness of God, fear overwhelms him. Such deep, conflicting emotions account for the fluctuation in Job between confidence and uncertainty. In attempting to build his trust in God, he must fight hard against the terror roused by his suffering.

David Clines: God's irresistible power and inscrutable behavior made Job afraid (23:13-17). Nevertheless he determined to confront God with His apparent injustice. What God had planned for Job (v. 14) seemed to him to be an interminable assault on his body.

A. (:13) God Is Uniquely Sovereign

*"But He is unique and who can turn Him?
And what His soul desires, that He does."*

Francis Andersen: The statement that 'He is One' carries with it an affirmation of God's **sole sovereignty**. 'He does what his own heart desires' (NEB). And the plans of God are multifarious beyond human comprehension (14b). Job is already coming close to the point he will reach at the end of the story. And how different his God is from the domesticated God of his friends. Yet Job's God is not lost in his own vastness. Job cannot scale the heights of 'the steep and trifold God', but he knows that God's plans are focused on himself personally (14a).

B. (:14) God Performs His Plans for Me

*"For He performs what is appointed for me,
And many such decrees are with Him."*

John Hartley: This confession alludes to the great confession of God in ancient Israel: "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is One." But this does mean that Job is making that particular confession. His confession means that there is no other God; God is both the source and the sustainer of all that exists. Job asks lamentingly, Who can turn or influence this great God? No one! God acts freely—whatever he desires he does. Job is not, however, charging God with acting capriciously. Rather his distress is that since God is not bound to a mechanistic application of his own laws, he does not have

to execute exact retribution immediately. Job fears then that God may carry out that which he has decreed against him. Therefore, he cries out in apprehensive agony that God may let him die before his honor is restored. In any case, Job realizes that his fate is not in his own hands. Job's struggle for faith reaches its severest test when his confidence in God collides with his fear of God.

David Guzik: Job here seemed to come closer and closer to the place God wanted him to be in his crisis. He comes closer and closer to realizing that God can be trusted, that God does in fact love and care for him; but at the same time He is sovereign, and at least some of His ways are beyond our knowing.

David Clines: I am perfectly innocent, says Job (as in **9:21**), but that does not make any difference to the way God treats me. He is determined upon his persecution of me, and there is no deflecting him from his purpose.

Albert Barnes: I am now meeting only what has been determined by his eternal plan. I know not what is the "reason" why it was appointed; but I see that God had resolved to do it, and that it is vain to resist him. So when we suffer, we may say the same thing. It is not by chance or hap-hazard that we are afflicted; it is because "God" has "appointed" that it should be so. It is not by passion or caprice on his part; not by sudden anger or wrath; but it is because he had determined to do it as a part of his eternal plan. It is much, when we are afflicted, to be able to make this reflection. I had rather be afflicted, feeling that it is "the appointment of God," than feeling that it is "by chance" or "hap-hazard." I had rather think that it is a part of a plan calmly and deliberately formed by God, than that it is the result of some unexpected and uncontrollable cause. In the one case, I see that mind and thought and plan have been employed, and I infer that there is a "reason" for it, though I cannot see it; in the other, I can see no proof of reason or of wisdom, and my mind finds no rest. The doctrine of divine purposes or decrees, therefore, is eminently adapted to give consolation to a sufferer. I had infinitely rather be under the operation of a plan or decree where there "may" be a reason for all that is done, though I cannot see it, than to feel that I am subject to the tossings of blind chance, where there can possibly be no reason.

C. (:15-17) God Scares Me Because He Might Choose to Afflict Me to Death

1. (:15) Terrified by God Presence

*"Therefore, I would be dismayed at His presence;
When I consider, I am terrified of Him."*

2. (:16) Dismayed by God's Appointed Afflictions

*"It is God who has made my heart faint,
And the Almighty who has dismayed me,"*

3. (:17) Not Silenced in the Face of Imminent Death

*"But I am not silenced by the darkness,
Nor deep gloom which covers me."*

John Hartley: The darkness (*hōšek*) cuts Job off from beholding God, and gloom (*ʾōpel*), settling over him, obscures God's presence. That is, he cannot detect God's grace anywhere. Since darkness and gloom are closely associated with Sheol (cf. **3:4–7; 10:21–22; 38:17**), this strong language indicates that Job feels the breath of death on his face.

David Clines: What is clear, despite the exegetical problems, is that his thought, as so often, has taken a downward turn, a dying fall. The language of longing with which the speech opened has given place to a depressive language that entertains no future. There is something worse than all his sufferings: the darkness that covers him is “not only his suffering, but his complete helplessness in the face of reality” (**Budde**). This powerful depiction of a legal encounter with God has in the end only served to sharpen his sense of God's injustice in his own case and total irresponsibility in the governance of the world. For it was all a falsity, that longing for being listened to and treated fairly, and the darkness means precisely that there is nothing to be seen, no end to his own suffering, no pattern for the universe, no contours, and no meaning.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you ever feel that God is hidden from you and unable to be found?
- 2) What assurance do you derive from the knowledge that God knows the way you take?
- 3) How can you encourage a high view of the value of God's Word in your life?
- 4) Do you maintain a high view of God's sovereignty even when you don't understand His working in your circumstances?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Clines: The **function** of the speech is twofold: on the one side, a more subjective and personal one, it heightens Job's demands for a legal disputation with God by the idea of his making a journey to God's own dwelling, only to dash his hopes still further by the recognition that this is no more than an unrealizable fantasy. On the other side, a more intellectual one, it constitutes a charge against God (though it is not couched in the second person) that, in doing nothing to punish the wicked, he has abdicated his responsibility for world order. Job's own case of injured innocence was the first proof, and the escape of the wicked from divine censure is now the second. By the end of the speech Job may be psychologically “*annihilated by darkness*” (**23:17**), but that does not

preclude his being intellectually convinced that there is no principle of just order anywhere to be found in the world.

The tonality of the speech ranges widely. As he considers his own case, Job moves from candor (23:2) to longing (23:3–5), from desperation (23:8–9) to self-assurance (23:10–12) and then immediately to utter despair (23:15–17).

David Thompson: IN SPITE OF ALL THE NEGATIVE CRITICISM WHICH HAD BEEN LEVELED AGAINST JOB, HE STILL MAINTAINED HIS INNOCENCE AND HIS POWERFUL VIEW OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

Derek Kidner: There are times when God seems far away. It is just such a time for Job; he feels totally deserted. He knows that his Redeemer lives (19:25), but he cannot find him (23:3). Job is more anxious than ever to present his case before God (23:4–5). When Job is finally given the opportunity to do so in the closing chapters, he becomes silent, indicating that Job is “not so anxious to prove his innocence by powerful rhetoric as he is to renew communion with God.” (John Hartley)

Job feels abandoned by God. He is experiencing what our forefathers would have called “spiritual desertion”, the feeling that God has forgotten us. It is the sense of isolation felt by the psalmist in so many of the lament psalms (**Psalms 13:1–4**). . .

The sense of being forgotten tends to make us feel humiliated. It is a feeling of being small and totally insignificant. Job did not know which way God was looking; he could not perceive the smile on his face. He was in a tunnel. God had forgotten him and hidden himself from him, yet God warned his people that they should never forget him (**Deuteronomy 8:11, 14, 19**). He would later reveal himself as the one who cannot forget his people (**Isaiah 49:15–16**).

John Dummelow: Job makes but slight reference to the remarks of Eliphaz, but continues to brood over the mysteries of God’s dealings with himself (**Job 23**), and with mankind (**Job 24**). All seems to betoken a God that hideth Himself. Yet he is evidently calmer and more trustful in God’s justice than in earlier speeches.

Warren Wiersbe: Job said that he had three complaints against the Lord:

1. “God is hiding from me” (23:1–12)
2. “God is frightening me” (23:13–17)
3. “God perplexes me” (24:1–25)

Charles Swindoll: One of the heretical ideas floating around these days is the “openness of God.” “Open Theism” is its theoretical name. . . It says that God is still learning as He watches us respond to situations. In other words, omniscience is not really omniscience. God is engaged in a kind of progressive knowledge. Nonsense! The God of our lives is fully aware and completely in charge of the way we take. Your need and mine is to “hold fast to His path, to keep His way and not turn aside . . . nor depart from the command of His lips.”

Job now makes a second declaration, which further reveals his vulnerability: “I’m unable to understand the plan of God, but I trust Him.” Remember his first statement? “I’m unable to locate the presence of God, but I trust Him.” Putting the two together will keep us balanced. And in each situation, we still trust Him. Job admits that God’s plan is unfolding, yet he’s not able to understand it. In fact, he refers to God as “*unique*.”

TEXT: Job 24:1-25

TITLE: *PROOF THAT THE DOCTRINE OF RETRIBUTION CANNOT BE RIGIDLY APPLIED*

BIG IDEA:

DON'T DENY THAT GOD AFFLICTS THE RIGHTEOUS SINCE WE CAN SEE THAT GOD ALLOWS THE WICKED TO PROSPER FOR NOW

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: Now he puts forth multiple examples of civil injustice (24:13, 9, 4–8, 10–11) and criminal injustice (24:12–17). God's apparent indifference to human activity compounds the evil that human beings do. These injustices threaten to turn society into chaos. . .

While Job awaits God's answer, his mind turns to the topsy-turvy affairs in the world that allow the wicked, given to self-serving, brutal deeds of violence, to oppress the weak and powerless. His own sufferings have made him more sensitive to widespread human suffering. He longs for God to rectify matters on earth. While he grieves at social evil, he remains so confident that God does eventually execute justice that he pronounces a series of curses against the wicked. Job's concern for injustice leads him to challenge the theology of his day, but at the same time, because of his profound faith in God, his lamenting drives him to God for an answer. He is anxious that God curse the wicked, holding them accountable for their evil deeds.

Pulpit Commentary: The general subject of this chapter is the **prosperity of the wicked**, whose proceedings and their results are traced out in detail (**vers. 2-24**). A single note of perplexity (**ver. 1**) forms a sufficient introduction; and a single note of challenge a sufficient epilogue (**ver. 25**).

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

David Clines: His [Job's] complaint against God in this speech [**chaps. 23-24**] has been twofold:

- that he cannot win from God a declaration of his innocence,
- and that God himself has given up on governing his world.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB'S CONUNDRUM -- WHY DOES GOD NOT ADMINISTER JUSTICE ON A CONSISTENT AND TIMELY BASIS?

*“Why are times not stored up by the Almighty,
And why do those who know Him not see His days?”*

John Hartley: This question has a double prick. On the one hand, the wicked take advantage of the lack of times of judgment to pursue their evil designs unhindered. On the other hand, the righteous endure hardship, hopeful of God's rectifying justice, but without ever being rewarded by God for their faithful perseverance. Consequently, **God's administration of justice seems sporadic, partial, and inconsistent.**

Elmer Smick: Job begins by expressing in one bicolon (v.1) the mood that dominates here—a complaint on **why God does not set straight the balance of justice**. Why does not his promised retribution come at set times against all ruthless oppressors? The chapter alternates in a discursive way between a description of the criminals (vv.2–4, 9) and their victims (vv.5–8, 10–12).

This theme is an exceedingly important part of the major message of the book. Job feels God should demonstrate his justice by openly punishing the wicked. In the divine speeches God will teach him a tremendous lesson about this, which Job does not now understand. That lesson centers around the idea that **the principle of retribution does not operate mechanically in this world but according to the divine will**. Although God is free to do as he pleases, Job knows he does not deserve his suffering. But how then does the age-old principle of retribution fit in?

In this chapter Job presents a picture of a world that is still a deep enigma to him. His courageous honesty leads him to expound the mystery of how the wicked get by unpunished while they perform their evil deeds against the innocent. The touching pathos of these word pictures should be felt by the reader, for they give us some insight into Job's contempt for wickedness and his ability to empathize with those in distress (cf. 31:13–22).

David Clines: In a properly governed world, there would no doubt be **immediate retribution** for the pious and for wrongdoers alike. Clearly God is not disposed to keep short accounts; but if he has not the inclination to mete out instant retribution, why does he at least not settle the score with humans on a **regular basis**, appointing assize days when he will weigh up their merits and demerits and apportion to them their rewards? Why are there no fixed “days” (as there were “Quarter Days” in England for the settling of accounts: Lady Day, Midsummer, Michaelmas, and Christmas), no days for judgment when God as a magistrate would pay a visit to outlying parts of his territories and settle outstanding cases and suits? Those who “know” God, i.e., who recognize his rights to rule, would then at least be able to look forward to justice that is not unreasonably delayed. It is an old legal principle, in England at least, that justice delayed is injustice, and Magna Carta (1215 C.E.) enshrined the principle that “To none will we sell, or deny, or delay right or justice.” And Job would play well the role of the

barons attempting to wrest from the unjust and extortionate King John such a safeguard for gentry like himself and for hungry peasants alike. . .

In asking “why” God does not keep assize days, Job is not seeking a reason, but uttering a lament that he does not (cf. the “why” questions in **3:11, 12**). We might have expected Job to wish that everyone, not just those who “know” God, should “see his days,” i.e., experience retribution, whether by way of reward or punishment. He would agree with that, of course, but he focuses here on the satisfaction that pious people would get from knowing that their piety is being recognized and rewarded. To “*know God*” is a rare expression in the wisdom literature (in Job only elsewhere at **18:21**; in Psalms only at **36:11 [10]; 79:6**; perhaps **87:4**; and in Proverbs only at **2:5**). It is a mainly prophetic term (see on **18:21**), and it is perhaps natural that it should occur here in a passage so reminiscent of prophetic condemnation of the wicked rich. To “*know*” God is essentially to recognize him and his rights; it is not so much to know or acknowledge that there is a God as to esteem him as God.

Francis Andersen: The claim of the friends, that God regularly enforces justice in the world, is not borne out by facts.

Tremper Longman: However, that the wicked get away with their crimes implies that God has not kept the “*times*” of judgment.

I. (2-17) JOB’S COMPLAINT OVER GOD’S FAILURE TO ADMINISTER JUSTICE ON A CONSISTENT AND TIMELY BASIS

A. (:2-12) God Seems Indifferent to Blatant Crimes =

The Property Crimes and Social Crimes that Target the Poor and Vulnerable

1. (:2-4) Delineation of Property and Social Crimes

a. (:2a) Removing Landmarks

“Some remove the landmarks;”

b. (:2b) Seizing Flocks

“They seize and devour flocks.”

John Hartley: Since the day of judgment never comes, the statutes designed to protect the weak members of the community are flagrantly violated. Greed inspires the arrogant rich to exploit the **poor**, the **weak**, and the **unfortunate**, i.e., the orphan (*yeṭômîm*), the widow (*’almānâ*; cf. **22:9**), and the needy (*’ebyônîm*). To secure property, the wicked craftily move boundary stones, the markers duly erected to delineate and protect a family’s property. In Mesopotamia some boundary markers were inscribed with specifications about the property and with reliefs of sacred objects to put the property under divine sanction. In ancient Israel, these stones were considered a sacred trust and were also never to be tampered with (cf. **Deut. 19:14; Prov. 23:10**). If such an inscribed stone was disturbed, the victim could lose a major portion of his property or possibly all of it. Whoever moved such a marker came under a divine curse (**Deut. 27:17**).

Furthermore, evildoers steal flocks and pasture the sheep openly. Driving off an entire flock, of course, wipes out a family's or a clan's means of support. Perhaps the evildoers are so blatant that they dare to pasture the stolen herd on the land gained by moving the boundary stones.

David Clines: **Seizing flocks** is a different crime; it is hardly likely to mean that the wicked steal animals and then openly pasture them on the fields they have taken possession of (as **Hartley**). Pasturing flocks cannot in itself of course be a crime, so it is not appropriate to translate "*they seize flocks and pasture them*" (as RSV, for example); it is necessary to adopt some such translation as NIV, "*they pasture flocks they have stolen*." They openly pasture the stolen flocks as if they were their own (**Duhm**). "*Flocks*" or "*herds*" are generally sheep (e.g., **Gen 29:2**) and, less commonly, goats (e.g., **Cant 4:1**), but they may also include cattle (as **Gen 32:17 [16]**); here we have no doubt sheep (and goats) in v 2 and ass and ox in v 3.

- c. (:3) Financial Exploitation or Orphans and Widows
*"They drive away the donkeys of the orphans;
They take the widow's ox for a pledge."*

David Clines: Who are being depicted in these verses as the perpetrators of crimes against the poor? They are not professional thieves or brigands who make their living from theft, for such people might do better robbing from the rich than from the poor. And they do not make off with what they have stolen, for landmarks have little resale value, and the flocks they have stolen they pasture under the noses of their victims. So they are **people of the same community** as the poor, people who are careless of ancestral custom, public opinion, and divine displeasure. They have the wealth to lend money at pledge, and they have the power and authority to remove landmarks. They must be the **chieftains and ruling class** in the kind of feudal society depicted as Job's, "powerful and wealthy landowners" (**Strahan**). And the portrayal of them in these verses must be from the point of view of their victims, since they themselves would be describing their actions not as theft or oppression but as the enforcing of their legal rights (**Davidson** speaks of "forms of law little different from violence"). All the actions in vv 2–3 are probably to be taken as resulting from **peasant debt**.

- d. (:4) Oppressing the Poor and Needy
*"They push the needy aside from the road;
The poor of the land are made to hide themselves altogether."*

John Hartley: When the weak live during an era of oppression, they have to guard their every movement, ever conscious of protecting themselves from harm. Afraid to travel by the worn paths lest they be robbed and beaten, the poor are forced together into hiding. While the poor must move about stealthily in fear for their own safety, the rich revel in luxury at the expense of those they oppress. Although the laws and the teachings from God were formulated to prevent such social oppression, God has not called these evildoers to account for breaking his laws so contemptuously.

Tremper Longman: Next to the orphan and the widow, the poor and needy (v. 4) are the epitome of vulnerability. After mentioning the abuse that the poor and needy feel at the hands of the wicked, Job goes into a long and pitiable description of their desperation (vv. 5–8), to be followed by another statement of oppression by the wicked (v. 9) and then another description of the suffering of the oppressed (vv. 10–12).

2. (:5-8) Description of the Suffering of the Poor and Needy

*“Behold, as wild donkeys in the wilderness
They go forth seeking food in their activity,
As bread for their children in the desert.
6 They harvest their fodder in the field,
And they glean the vineyard of the wicked.
7 They spend the night naked, without clothing,
And have no covering against the cold.
8 They are wet with the mountain rains,
And they hug the rock for want of a shelter.”*

David Clines: The sufferings of the poor are depicted not for the sake of the poor but for the sake of Job’s theological program: their misery is the evidence he needs to show that God has abandoned the moral government of the universe.

Tremper Longman: At this point, Job goes off on an excursus to describe the horrible conditions of the poor and needy. At first he describes them as **wild donkeys** in the wilderness, an area with subsistence-level resources. The work of these donkeys (the poor and needy) is to do their best to forage for food for their children. Wild donkeys are ragged and desperate. **Verse 6** speaks of the poor and needy finding food in fields/vineyards that are not their own.

Francis Andersen: At some point the description of the plight of the dispossessed changes to the wretchedness of overworked labourers, exploited with low wages, clad in rags, hungry for the harvest they gather for the well-fed owner. Thirsty, they tread the grapes.

3. (:9-11) Deprivation of the Poor and Needy

David Clines: Job, however, is not a prophet, inveighing against the ills of his society, or, like an Amos, announcing a forthcoming destruction because of long-standing social injustices. On the contrary, it is Job’s point that such injustices prevail and **God does nothing about them**, charging no one with wrongdoing (cf. NIV), and not treating the injustice as unseemly (cf. NAB). The key to the whole of his social comment is the complaint, “*Why are days of assize not kept by the Almighty?*” (v 1).

a. (:9) Deprived of Physical Necessities

*“Others snatch the orphan from the breast,
And against the poor they take a pledge.”*

b. (:10) Deprived of Clothing and Food

*“They cause the poor to go about naked without clothing,
And they take away the sheaves from the hungry.”*

c. (:11) Deprived of the Fruit of Their Labor

*“Within the walls they produce oil;
They tread wine presses but thirst.”*

John Hartley: Job shifts (though the exact place of the shift is hard to pinpoint) from the miserable conditions of the poor to the harsh working practices afforded day laborers. They are so poor they have to work without protective clothing. In **v. 7** the emphasis is on the lack of clothing for warmth; in **v. 10** the issue is that the laborers do not have the proper clothing to protect them from the hazards of their work.

The conditions under which they must work compound their misery. They are forced to work with the very essentials that their bodies cry out for. Famished by hard work, some have to carry sheaves all day long and yet are forbidden to eat any of the grain. Others, like beasts of burden, have to pull the heavy millstones that press out the olive oil. Others must tread the grapes in the winepresses which empty the juice into the vat (*yeqeb*). These laborers are parched with thirst while producing liquids, but they are unable to have any of the liquid to quench their thirst. Sapping a worker's strength without giving him any nourishment or allowing him a share in the joy of his toil is the height of inhumane labor practices (cf. **Jas. 5:1–6**). According to the highest standards, landlords were supposed to let their workers share in the results of their labor. Note that these two verses mention the three staples, grain, wine, and oil, which represent the products of the soil which God gives to sustain human life (e.g., **Hos. 2:11, 24 [Eng. 9, 22]**).

4. (:12) Divine Indifference?

*“From the city men groan,
And the souls of the wounded cry out;
Yet God does not pay attention to folly.”*

Elmer Smick: The climax is **v.12c**, which returns to the theme of **v.1**. The great enigma is that all this is going on and God does nothing (cf. **Ps 73:2–3; Hab 1:13; Mal 3:15**).

David Guzik: *Yet God does not charge them with wrong:* This was the part that was difficult for Job to understand and accept. He knew how wicked the wicked were; what he could not comprehend was **why God did not judge them as they deserved**.

David Thompson: Job's point is that God does not immediately come to the rescue of the poor, of the orphan, and of the widow, even when they cry to Him. It is almost as if the wicked are getting away totally unscathed. Remember Job's friends are alleging that God is punishing him because he is so wicked and Job says God does not typically punish wicked people that way.

B. (:13-17) God Seems Indifferent to Secret Crimes = The Deeds of Darkness Committed by Criminals

David Clines: The important question is: What is this picture of the enemies of the light doing in this context, where Job's purpose is to criticize God's failure to keep days of assize (v 1), and where his constant theme has been the victimization of the poor by the wealthy and powerful (vv 2–12)? It might be thought that these too are wrongdoers, "a new class of malefactors" (**Davidson**), who deserve God's judgment but are allowed to escape by his negligence. But then there would be no connection with the preceding verses. It is preferable to translate the beginning of v 13 literally, "*They are among those who rebel against the light*"; the preposition *beth*, "in, among," before "those who rebel" is a crucial one. The theme of this strophe is still, as it has been hitherto, the **wealthy oppressors of the poor**, who are now said to be fellows of those who flagrantly breach the law, the "*rebels against the light*." The rich, as we have seen, are pillars of the community, who rely on social custom and law for their legitimation and would be horrified at being classed with lawbreakers. So Job's complaint against God is, not that he does not call murderers and adulterers and thieves to account—for in most cases, he does not need to do so; society has already identified them and brought them to book—but that **he does not carry out the judgments** that he alone is responsible for: determining that social injustice, even when it is according to law, is an evil, and punishing those, even when they are in power in society, who take advantage of an unjust system. . .

The real enemies of the light, however, are not those who cover their crimes with darkness, but those who cover them with light: the powerful and esteemed in society, with whom this chapter has been principally concerned, who use publicly legitimated law and custom for their own aggrandizement and to the oppression of the weak.

1. (:13) Preference for Darkness over Light

*"Others have been with those who rebel against the light;
They do not want to know its ways, Nor abide in its paths."*

John Hartley: Job describes the stealthy activity of those who are rebels against the light: the **murderer**, the **thief**, and the **adulterer**. Such criminals work at night under the protection that darkness affords their evil deeds. They do not know, i.e., willingly follow, the light, the source of life and truth. If they ever were to discover the right way, they would not have the inner strength to stay faithfully on that rugged path.

2. (:14-16) Three Categories of Criminals Who Operate in the Darkness

a. (:14a) The Murderer

*"The murderer arises at dawn;
He kills the poor and the needy,"*

b. (:14b) The Thief

"And at night he is as a thief."

c. (:15) The Adulterer

*“And the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight,
Saying, ‘No eye will see me.’
And he disguises his face.”*

d. (:16) Summary = They Operate in the Darkness

*“In the dark they dig into houses,
They shut themselves up by day;
They do not know the light.”*

Tremper Longman: While above (v. 14) Job says murderers brazenly commit their crimes during the day, here he points out that evil people are creatures of the night (vv. 16–17). They do evil during the night, and they hide themselves during the light of day. They do not know the light, but are on friendly terms with (recognize) the darkness. They feel comfortable when their acts are hidden from eyes.

3. (:17) Preference for Darkness over Light

*“For the morning is the same to him as thick darkness,
For he is familiar with the terrors of thick darkness.”*

John Hartley: All these criminals shut [Piel of *ḥāṭam*] themselves in by day. The Hebrew word *ḥāṭam* means literally “seal.” In their dwelling places they feel as **secure** as a sealed document. Never taking any risk of discovery, they do not want to know the light. Because they live by an opposite standard, their attitude to the times of the day is reversed. Morning, which fills most people with joy and expectation, is for them deep darkness (*ṣalmāwet*). Since light fills them with fear of discovery, they lay low during the day, taking their rest. But at night when the terrors of deep darkness reign, they feel at ease. Thus the wicked reject light and accept darkness as their protector and assistant.

II. (:18-24) JOB’S CERTAINTY REGARDING THE EVENTUAL PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED

Tremper Longman: **Chapter 24** ends on a totally different note from how it began. After castigating the wickedness of evil people and how they get away with their oppression of the weak, Job moves to a blistering description of the **horrible fate** that awaits such sinners. . . . On the ground that Job is against not the retribution principle in general but only its misapplication to him, I concluded that we should take this passage as part of Job’s speech rather than reassign it to one of the friends. In short, after describing the evil actions of evil people in **24:1–17**, he expresses either the certainty or the hope that a bad fate will come to them.

A. (:18-20) The Destiny of the Wicked Is Cursed

John MacArthur: Again Job referred to the opinions of his counselors, saying that, if their view were correct, all the wicked should be experiencing punishment. But it is obvious they were not.

1. (:18) Regarded as Insignificant, Cursed and Unsatisfied

*“They are insignificant on the surface of the water;
Their portion is cursed on the earth.
They do not turn toward the vineyards.”*

2. (:19) Reduced to Nothing Like the Melting Snow

*“Drought and heat consume the snow waters,
So does Sheol those who have sinned.”*

3. (:20) Remembered No More

*“A mother will forget him;
The worm feeds sweetly till he is remembered no more.
And wickedness will be broken like a tree.”*

B. (:21-22) The Crimes of the Wicked Persist for Now

1. (:21) Mistreating the Vulnerable

*“He wrongs the barren woman,
And does no good for the widow.”*

John Hartley: This verse is also problematic. Perhaps it is based on the theme of retaliation in kind. The curse is that the evildoer’s lady companion might not bear. This curse is designed to leave this wicked man without heir. The second part of the curse is that his widow might not be left with any good. She is not to prosper from his evil deeds.

2. (:22) Manhandling the Valiant

*“But He drags off the valiant by His power;
He rises, but no one has assurance of life.”*

C. (:23-24) The Prosperity of the Wicked Is Only Temporary

1. (:23) Temporary Security before Final Judgment

*“He provides them with security, and they are supported;
And His eyes are on their ways.”*

Matthew Henry: He foresees their fall however, and that their death, though they die in ease and honour, will be their ruin. God's eyes are upon their ways, **v. 23**. Though he keep silence, and seem to connive at them, yet he takes notice, and keeps account of all their wickedness, and will make it to appear shortly that their most secret sins, which they thought no eye should see (**v. 15**), were under his eye and will be called over again. Here is no mention of the punishment of these sinners in the other world, but it is intimated in the particular notice taken of the consequences of their death.

1. The consumption of the body in the grave, though common to all, yet to them is in the nature of a punishment for their sin. The grave shall consume those that have sinned; that land of darkness will be the lot of those that love darkness rather than light. The bodies they pampered shall be a feast for worms, which shall feed as sweetly on them as ever they fed on the pleasures and gains of their sins.

2. Though they thought to make themselves a great name by their wealth, and power, and mighty achievements, yet their memorial perished with them, **Ps 9 6**. He that made himself so much talked of shall, when he is dead, be no more remembered with honour; his name shall rot, **Prov 10 7**. Those that durst not give him his due character while he lived shall not spare him when he is dead; so that the womb that bore him, his own mother, shall forget him, that is, shall avoid making mention of him, and shall think that the greatest kindness she can do him, since no good can be said of him. That honour which is got by sin will soon turn into shame.

3. The wickedness they thought to establish in their families shall be broken as a tree; all their wicked projects shall be blasted, and all their wicked hopes dashed and buried with them.

4. Their pride shall be brought down and laid in the dust (**v. 24**); and, in mercy to the world, they shall be taken out of the way, and all their power and prosperity shall be cut off. You may seek them, and they shall not be found. Job owns that wicked people will be miserable at last, miserable on the other side death, but utterly denies what his friends asserted, that ordinarily they are miserable in this life.

2. (:24) Temporary Exaltation before Final Judgment

*“They are exalted a little while, then they are gone;
Moreover, they are brought low and like everything gathered up;
Even like the heads of grain they are cut off.”*

John Hartley: Job prays that God may give the wicked security on which to lean for support, while he continually keeps his eyes on their ways. But God lets them be exalted only for a brief time. Soon he judges them, and they are no more. The higher they rise, the harder they will fall. They are laid low and shrivel up like grass or wither like heads of grain beneath the scorching sun. Just as the grain is dried up before it comes to harvest, God brings them down by a miserable fate before they enjoy the fruit of their evil schemes.

(:25) EPILOGUE – JOB’S CHALLENGE = PROVE ME WRONG

*“Now if it is not so, who can prove me a liar,
And make my speech worthless?”*

Spurgeon: Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms, — that the righteous may be greater sufferers, and the wicked may for awhile prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly, and establish the righteous.

Elmer Smick: It is curious that in **v.25** Job speaks as though he has just made an argument against the views of his friends rather than partially agreeing with them. The verse is a clue to the rhetoric of the chapter. It is not a disconnected assemblage of pieces put together by scribes who wanted to make Job sound more orthodox. An argument based on this verse can be made for literary unity in this chapter. We must go back to the nodal statement in **v.1** and examine it carefully. The verb *šāpan* (GK 7621), there translated “set,” means literally “store up.” Job’s query there is, “Why is there not a storing up of judgment by the Almighty so that his friends can eventually see the day [**v.2**] of his wrath on the wicked?” Job is anticipating “the day of the LORD,” a theme stressed by some of the prophets (cf. Joel).

The query of **v.1** fits with Job’s view that the wicked prosper. After developing a series of vignettes, with as much pathos as possible, about the deeds of the wicked and the sufferings of their victims (**vv.1–17**), Job finally mouths the view of his friends about God’s judgment on the wicked. Job may either be quoting them with irony or complaining that this judgment comes **piecemeal**, a little here and a little there (see esp. **vv.23–24**).

Eventually the wicked die and are forgotten; they lack security and have their day only for a little while (**22:16–18**)—but **where are the great days of stored-up judgment** so the righteous can be sure that justice for such horrors is meted out? Job is not convinced that piecemeal judgment is truly just since the righteous often suffer the same. So **v.25** is not a disconnected verse. Literally it forms an *inclusio* with the original query in **v.1**. Here the book of Job again anticipates a step forward in theological understanding (cf. **14:14–15; 19:25–27**). There is no direct teaching of final judgment to set right the balance of justice, but there is a concept here that anticipates the teaching that God must have his day.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God not judge sinners immediately?
- 2) How can God permit such injustice to persist for so long?
- 3) In what ways are the wicked self-deceived?
- 4) What lessons can we learn from the ultimate judgment on the wicked?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Joseph Benson: That many [wicked] live at ease, who yet are ungodly and profane, and despise all the exercises of devotion, he had showed, chap. 21. Now he goes further, and shows that many who are mischievous to mankind, and live in open defiance of all the laws of justice and common honesty, yet thrive and succeed in their unrighteous practices; and we do not see them reckoned with in this world. He first lays down his general proposition, that **the punishment of wicked people is not so visible and apparent** as his friends supposed, and then proves it by an induction of particulars. . .

Vs. 18 -- *He is swift as the waters* That is, the wicked man quickly passeth away, with all his glory, as the waters, which never stay in one place, but are always hasting away. *Their portion* Or, *his* portion (for he still speaks of the same person, though with a change of the number) *is cursed in the earth*. His habitation and estate, which he leaves behind him, is accursed of God; and, by all men who live near it, or observe it, is pronounced accursed, because of the remarkable judgments of God upon it, and upon his posterity or family, to which he left it, and from whom it is strangely and unexpectedly alienated. *He beholdeth not the way of the vineyards* -- He shall never more see or enjoy his vineyards, or other pleasant places and things, which seem to be comprehended under this particular. Thus, though Job constantly maintains against his friends, that many ungodly men do prosper, and escape punishment, in this life, yet, withal, he asserts that God will certainly, sooner or later, punish them; and that he sometimes doth it here, cutting them off by cruel and untimely deaths, or otherwise inflicting some notable judgment upon them, of which he also speaks **Job 21:17**.

Vs. 19 -- *Drought and heat consume the snow-waters* -- As the snow, though it doth for a time lie upon the ground, yet at last is dissolved into water by the heat of the season, and that water is quickly swallowed up by the earth when it is dry and thirsty; so ungodly sinners, though they live and prosper for a season, yet at last shall go into the grave, which will consume them, together with all their hopes and comforts; their merry life is followed by a sad and oftentimes sudden death; not with such a death as the godly die, which perfects them, and brings them to happiness, but with a consuming and never-dying death.

Vs. 23 -- *Though it be given him* -- Namely, of God; *to be in safety* -- That is, though God granteth to the oppressor to be for a time in apparent safety, and to live a comfortable life; *whereon he resteth* -- His former experience of God's long-suffering makes him confident of the continuance of it, so that he is not only happy in his present enjoyments, but also in his freedom from distracting fears of future miseries; *yet his eyes are upon their ways* -- That is, the eyes of God, who, although he gives wicked men such strange successes and great prosperity, yet he sees and observes them all, and marks their whole conduct, and will in due time punish them severely.

Charles Swindoll: Job's third declaration, woven through this chapter, is equally profound: "I'm unable to justify the permissions of God, but I trust Him." What does

Job mean? He starts in the country (vv. 1-11) where he sets forth several situations God permits. He then goes to the city (vv. 12-17), and he does the same. Finally at the end (vv. 18-24), he levels curses against the wicked, and leaves it at that. . .

There are wrongs, there are failures, and there are injustices. There were robberies and sexual sins and hidden wrongs done in the dark, and where is God? He is permitting it. Why? "I don't know," says Job. "I think His point here is that these things are allowed for purposes unknown to us, exactly like what's happened to me. God has permitted it all!" Those who do wrong get away with it. Those who take advantage of others get away with that. Unexplainable suffering falls into the same category.

John Hartley: While Job awaits God's answer, his mind turns to the topsy-turvy affairs in the world that allow the wicked, given to self-serving, brutal deeds of violence, to oppress the weak and powerless. His own sufferings have made him more sensitive to widespread human suffering. He longs for God to rectify matters on earth. While he grieves at social evil, he remains so confident that God does eventually execute justice that he pronounces a series of curses against the wicked. Job's concern for injustice leads him to challenge the theology of his day, but at the same time, because of his profound faith in God, his lamenting drives him to God for an answer. He is anxious that God curse the wicked, holding them accountable for their evil deeds.

Matthew Henry: Job having by his complaints in the foregoing chapter given vent to his passion, and thereby gained some ease, breaks them off abruptly, and now applies himself to a further discussion of the doctrinal controversy between him and his friends concerning the prosperity of wicked people. That many live at ease who yet are ungodly and profane, and despise all the exercises of devotion, he had shown, **ch. 21**. Now here he goes further, and shows that many who are mischievous to mankind, and live in open defiance to all the laws of justice and common honesty, yet thrive and succeed in their unrighteous practices; and we do not see them reckoned with in this world. What he had said before (**ch. 12:6**), "*The tabernacles of robbers prosper*," he here enlarges upon. He lays down his general proposition (**ver 1**), that the punishment of wicked people is not so visible and apparent as his friends supposed, and then proves it by an induction of particulars.

- I. Those that openly do wrong to their poor neighbours are not reckoned with, nor the injured righted (**ver 2-12**), though the former are very barbarous, **ver 21, 22**.
- II. Those that secretly practise mischief often go undiscovered and unpunished, **ver 13-17**.
- III. That God punished such by secret judgments and reserves them for future judgments (**ver 18-20**, and **23-25**), so that, upon the whole matter, **we cannot say that all who are in trouble are wicked; for it is certain that all who are in prosperity are not righteous.**

TEXT: Job 25:1-6

TITLE: *BILDAD'S THIRD SPEECH – MAGGOT THEOLOGY = MAN IS INSIGNIFICANT BEFORE GOD*

BIG IDEA:

INSIGNIFICANT MAN SHOULD FORGET ABOUT SEEKING VINDICATION AND PURITY FROM THE MAJESTIC GOD WHO REIGNS ABOVE

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: Thus Bildad, in quoting from the hymns of the congregation, impugns Job's speculation that a human being could even attempt to enter into litigation with God. He is seeking to show Job that his hope of defending his own integrity is absurd in the light of God's absolute holiness. He is also denouncing Job's bold accusation that God does not keep times of judgment.

Elmer Smick: Most modern scholars have lengthened this short speech by including **26:5-14**, but there is no obvious reason why this should be done. The theme is similar but not the same.

David Guzik: Yet while acknowledging some difficulties in the text, it is better to simply see the **brevery** of this final statement from Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar to reflect the fact that the debate is running out of fuel and starts a transition to a different stage of the book.

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

Derek Kidner: It is a hymn of praise, a brief doxology, extolling the majesty of God in comparison to the sinfulness of man. "The speech is reverent but irrelevant." [**Meredith Kline**] For Bildad, man's insignificance cannot possibly occupy the attention of such a sovereign God. But for Job, God's very omniscience – his boundless capacity for knowledge – implies that he can, and does, give man his individual attention. Bildad and Job are worlds apart.

E.S.P. Heavenor: When the mightiest heavenly bodies must tremble before Him, subdued and convicted, how can insignificant and corrupt man hope to look up, unafraid of what the light may disclose? Cf. **4:17ff.** and **15:14ff.**

Tremper Longman: In his attempt to puncture what he perceives as Job's self-righteousness, Bildad argues that humans are maggots, even worms. He hopes that Job

will apply this general truth to himself and recognize that **he is not in a position to challenge God.**

By comparing humans to maggots and worms, Bildad is emphasizing that humans are corrupting and corrupted. Maggots and worms spoil the things that they consume, whether the manna in the wilderness (**Exod. 16:20, 24**) or dead bodies (**Isa. 14:11**). Their association with the grave and with dead bodies also highlights the fragility and temporariness of life.

Is Bildad's maggot theology correct in general and in its application to Job? Indeed, if it is not applicable to Job, then it is not applicable to humans as a whole. If the Bible is clear about anything, it is clear that humans were not created as worms or maggots. **Genesis 1–2** emphasizes the dignity of humans in the way it depicts their creation on the last day, after everything else has been set in place. That Adam was created from the dust of the ground and the breath of God, while acknowledging his creaturely status, also indicates a special and dignified relationship to God. Most important, of course, is that humans are **created in the image of God**. In other words, they reflect the divine glory like the moon reflects the light of the sun.

If the Bible is clear about anything, however, it is that humans have marred their dignified status by their rebellion against God. The harmony that Adam and Eve enjoyed with God, each other, and creation was lost through their sin. In other words, humans, through their willful acts, can reduce themselves to maggot-like status. In **Isa. 41:14** God calls sinful Israel “*you worm*.” But note that God also presents himself as the redeemer of worm-like Israel.

A. P. Davidson: Bildad does not appear to touch Job's argument as to God's rule of the world. He only seeks to subdue the immeasurable arrogance of Job in thinking that he would be found guiltless if placed before the judgment-seat of God (ch. Xxiii.3-7), and in challenging the rectitude of God's rule of the world. With this view he contrasts the exalted Majesty of God and His universal power, which the countless hosts on high obey, and the purity of God in whose eyes the moon is dark and the stars are not pure, with the littleness and the earthly nature of man – who is a worm.

Charles Swindoll: This represents Bildad's last shot. He speaks first of God's power and greatness and then of God's justice and man's sinfulness. In so many words he is telling Job that God is all light, and he is all darkness, and that's why he's suffering. His two concluding analogies “maggot” and “worm” pretty much wrap things up.

(:1) PROLOGUE – RESPONSE OF BILDAD

“Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,”

I. (:2-3) THE MAJESTIC GOD REIGNS ABOVE

A. (:2) Establishes Peace While Exercising Dominion

1. Exercises Dominion

“Dominion and awe belong to Him”

Albert Barnes: That is, God has a right to rule, and he ought to be regarded with **reverence**. The object of Bildad is to show that He is so great and glorious that it is impossible that man should be regarded as pure in his sight. He begins, therefore, by saying, that he is a Sovereign; that he is clothed with majesty, and that he is worthy of profound veneration.

Joseph Benson: Absolute and sovereign power over all persons and things, so that it is both rebellion and madness to contend with him; and terror, which justly makes him dreadful to all men, and especially to all that undertake to dispute with him. In other words, awful majesty and infinite knowledge are his, whereby he is much better acquainted with men’s hearts and ways than they are themselves, and sees much sin in them, which themselves do not discover; and to him belong also exact purity and justice, which render him formidable to sinners. These are with him whom thou challengest; with him who is not lightly and irreverently to be named, much less to be contended with; and therefore it is thy duty to humble thyself before him, and quietly and modestly to submit thyself and thy cause to his pleasure.

2. Establishes Peace

“Who establishes peace in His heights.”

George Barton: Bildad's opening words are a reply to Job's charge in the preceding chapter that God encourages and protects crime. Bildad declares that God has not only power (*dominion*), but suggests that he so exercises it as to produce reverence and fear. *He maketh peace in the high places*. So far from countenancing crime, God is the establisher of peace, Bildad asserts.

John Hartley: Bildad lauds **God’s sovereign power**. From his heights God reigns over the entire world. He is so awesome in holiness that people stand in dread of him. Even in heaven there is no force that would dare challenge his rule, for his dominion is too great. Having complete authority, he makes peace [*šālôm*] in his heights, his place of abode. . . . If there are no powers in opposition to God in heaven, certainly there are none on earth. Through this line of reasoning Bildad categorically rejects Job’s lament that there are numerous cases of injustice on earth (**24:1–17**). The truth is that God rules supreme over all creatures in heaven and on earth (cf. **Jer. 33:9**).

Tremper Longman: **Verses 2–3** assert that God is uniquely **powerful**. He is the ultimate ruler, who establishes peace because of his power and numberless troops (presumably a reference to his heavenly army). He is **sovereign** over all, so that his light (*“the sun”*) rises on all creatures.

David Thompson: It would appear that Bildad is saying to Job, since God sovereignly controls all of the tranquility that exists in heaven, so also He can work out His perfect

will on earth in a person's life and if Job was right with God, things would be peaceful and tranquil for him.

B. (:3) Enlightens All While Commanding Innumerable Forces

1. Commands Innumerable Forces

"Is there any number to His troops?"

John Hartley: The heavenly hosts constitute God's troops or armies (*gedûdāyw*). All of them are obedient to his command and serve to ensure his peaceful rule. The rhetorical question claims that his troops are so numerous that they are beyond counting. The opposite expression—that something can be numbered—means that it is limited and insignificant.

2. Enlightens All

"And upon whom does His light not rise?"

John Hartley: Further, God's gracious, universal rule is affirmed through the image of light. Light shines everywhere, bringing warmth, joy, and life. God, the source of light, empowers life and sustains all his creatures, for there is none on whom his light does not rise.

Albert Barnes: This is designed evidently to show the majesty and glory of God. It refers probably to the **light of the sun**, as the light which he creates and commands. The idea is, that it pervades all things; that, as controlled by him, it penetrates all places, and flows over all worlds. The image is a striking and sublime one, and nothing is better fitted to show the **majesty and glory** of God.

II. (:4) VINDICATION AND PURITY CANNOT BE ATTAINED BY SINFUL MAN

A. No Possibility of Vindication before God

"How then can a man be just with God?"

B. No Possibility of Purity before God

"Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?"

David Guzik: The purpose of these questions seems to be to cause Job to understand that he is a sinner just like all, making it easier for him to confess and repent.

III. (:5-6) MAN IS FAR LESS SIGNIFICANT THAN THE MOON AND STARS WHICH HAVE NO BRIGHTNESS OR PURITY BEFORE GOD

A. (:5) Moon and Stars Pale before God's Glorious Presence

*"If even the moon has no brightness
And the stars are not pure in His sight,"*

John Hartley: Bildad defends God's way of governing the world by saying that nothing except God himself is pure or flawless. The moon, which shines brightly enough in the Middle East for a traveler to find his way across the steppe at night, is not bright in God's judgment. And the stars are not pure [*zākāk*] in his sight. Even though the moon and the stars, members of God's heavenly army, appear so bright to mankind, they have no innate purity that gives them any position with God. They too must serve him out of contrition and unworthiness. If this is true of these marvelous heavenly bodies, how much more is it true of mankind.

B. (:6) Man's Standing Compared to Lowly Maggots and Worms

*"How much less man, that maggot,
And the son of man, that worm!"*

John Hartley: The concluding hymnic line emphasizes human frailty and moral ineptitude. A human being is but a maggot (*rimmā*) and a worm (*tôlē 'â*). These terms symbolize a wretched, lowly existence, and they have the smell of death about them. Also, the words man (*'ēnôš*) and son of man (*ben- 'āḏām*) bear the note of human weakness and earthiness. Illness and loss make a person's life so wretched that he feels like a maggot, and he can look forward only to the grave, where he will be consumed by worms (cf. **Isa. 14:11**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the theology of Bildad fail to grasp the significance of man being made in **the image of God**?
- 2) As **God's children**, how significant are we to our Heavenly Father?
- 3) What type of **vindication** and **purity** is Job seeking?
- 4) Where do you find yourself embracing **maggot theology** in a practical sense?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Francis Andersen: Bildad has taken a flight to heaven and, by emphasizing its vast population, implies not only that God's limitless resources cannot be opposed, but also that no person can hope to comprehend God's enterprises. Job has no quarrel with such assertions. But how different the inference! According to Bildad, puny man counts for nothing in the infinite space of God's mind. But Job thinks that God, precisely because of his boundless capacity for knowledge, can give to each individual the most complete personal attention.

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

David Thompson: **Job 25** is the **shortest chapter** in the book of Job. It is the final speech of Bildad. By virtue of the fact that this final speech is so short, and by virtue of the fact that Zophar doesn't even bother to give a final speech, we learn that this group had finally run out of fuel. They were out of gas. After all their allegations, after all their insinuations, and after all their criticisms and condemnations, they were finally out of steam. **Dr. Samuel Cox** believes Bildad finally realized there was nothing he could say to the facts that had been offered by Job. These guys had taken their best verbal shot at Job and now they were left with egg all over their faces with nothing more to say. God was shutting their mouths!

WHEN ONE WHO IS FAITHFUL TO GOD IS BEING FALSELY ACCUSED, IF HE WILL STICK TO HIS POSITION OF INNOCENCE AND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, EVENTUALLY THOSE WHO ARE ACCUSING WILL RUN OUT OF ARGUMENTS AND THEIR MOUTHS WILL BE CLOSED.

Warren Wiersbe: **God's Justice** is the outworking of His holy nature (**vv. 4-6**), for "*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*" (**1 John 1:5**). Since God is holy and just, how can mere man claim to be righteous before Him? (Remember, Job was holding fast to his integrity and refusing to confess that his sins had brought God's judgment on him.) Since man is born of woman, he is born with a sinful nature (**Ps. 51:5**). In the East, the moon and stars shine with great brilliance; but even they are not pure in God's sight. How can a mere man claim to be righteous before God, man who is nothing but a maggot and a worm? (See Job 4:17-18; 8:20; 9:2). Now, we listen to Job's reply.

Robert A. Watson: The brief ode has a certain dignity raising it above the level of Bildad's previous utterances. He desires to show that Job has been too bold in his criticism of providence. God has sole dominion and claims universal adoration. Where He dwells in the lofty place of unapproachable glory His presence and rule create peace. He is the Lord of innumerable armies (the stars and their inhabitants perhaps), and His light fills the breadth of interminable space, revealing and illuminating every life. Upon this assertion of the majesty of God is based the idea of His holiness: Before so great and glorious a Being how can man be righteous? The universality of His power and the brightness of His presence stand in contrast to the narrow range of human energy and the darkness of the human mind.

Behold, says Bildad, the moon is eclipsed by a glance of the great Creator and the stars are cast into shadow by His effulgence; and how shall man whose body is of the earth earthly claim any cleanness of soul? He is like the worm; his kinship is with corruption;

his place is in the dust like the creeping things of which he becomes the prey. The representation of God in His exaltation and glory has a tone of impressive piety which redeems Bildad from any suspicion of insolence at this point. He is including himself and his friends among those whose lives appear impure in the sight of Heaven. He is showing that successfully as Job may repel the charges brought against him, there is at all events one general condemnation in which with all men he must allow himself to be involved. Is he not a feeble ignorant man whose will, being finite, must be imperfect? On the one hand is the pious exaltation of God, on the other the pious abasement of man.

It is, however, easy to see that Bildad is still bound to a creed of the superficial kind without moral depth or spiritual force. The ideas are those of a nature religion in which the one God is a supreme Baal or Master, monopolizing all splendor, His purity that of the fire or the light. We are shown the Lord of the visible universe whose dwelling is in the high heavens, whose representative is the bright sun from the light of which nothing is hidden. It is easy to point to this splendid apparition and, contrasting man with the great fire force, the perennial fountain of light, to say-How dark, how puny, how imperfect is man! The brilliance of an Arabian sky through which the sun marches in unobstructed glory seems in complete contrast to the darkness of human life. Yet, is it fair, is it competent to argue thus? Is anything established as to the moral quality of man because he cannot shine like the sun or even with the lesser light of moon or stars? One may allow a hint of strong thought in the suggestion that boundless majesty and power are necessary to perfect virtue, that the Almighty alone can be entirely pure. But Bildad cannot be said to grasp this idea. If it gleams before his mind, the faint flash passes unrecognised. He has not wisdom enough to work out such a thought. And it is nature that according to his argument really condemns man. Job is bidden look up to the sun and moon and stars and know himself immeasurably less pure than they.

But the truth stands untouched that man whose body is doomed to corruption, man who labours after the right, with the heat of moral energy in his heart, moves on a far higher plane as a servant of God than any fiery orb which pours its light through boundless space. **We find ignorance of man and therefore of his Maker in Bildad's speech.** He does not understand the dignity of the human mind in its straining after righteousness. "With limitless duration, with boundless space and number without end, Nature does at least what she can to translate into visible form the wealth of the creative formula. By the vastness of the abysses into which she penetrates in the effort, the unsuccessful effort, to house and contain the eternal thought we may measure the greatness of the Divine mind. For as soon as this mind goes out of itself and seeks to explain itself, the effort at utterance heaps universe upon universe during myriads of centuries, and still it is not expressed and the great oration must go on forever and ever." The inanimate universe majestic, ruled by eternal law, cannot represent the moral qualities of the Divine mind, and the attempt to convict a thinking man, whose soul is bent on truth and purity, by the splendour of that light which dazzles his eye, comes to nothing. The commonplaces of pious thought fall stale and flat in a controversy like the present. Bildad does not realise wherein the right of man in the universe consists. He is trying in vain to instruct one who sees that moral desire and struggle are the conditions of human

greatness, who will not be overborne by material splendours nor convicted by the accident of death.

Roy Zuck: The majesty of God, in contrast with the insignificance and iniquity of all men, not just of Job and the wicked, is the theme of this speech. Possibly this was a last-ditch effort to get Job to see how useless it is for an impure human to try to schedule a court hearing with the majestic God.

Albert Barnes: Here it means, that man is poor, feeble, powerless. In comparison with God he is a **crawling worm**. All that is said in this chapter is true and beautiful, but it has nothing to do with the subject in debate. Job had appealed to the course of events in proof of the truth of his position. The true way to meet that was either to deny that the facts existed as he alleged, or to show that they did not prove what he had adduced them to establish. But Bildad did neither; nor did he ingenuously confess that the argument was against him and his friends. At this stage of the controversy, since they had nothing to reply to what Job had alleged, it would have been honorable in them to have acknowledged that they were in error, and to have yielded the palm of victory to him. But it requires extraordinary candor and humility to do that; and rather than do it, most people would prefer to say something - though it has nothing to do with the case in hand.

TEXT: Job 26:1-14

TITLE: *JOB'S THIRD REPLY TO BILDAD – YOUR COUNSEL IS WORTHLESS / GOD'S POWER IS AWESOME*

BIG IDEA:

WORTHLESS COUNSEL FAILS TO DRAW OUT RELEVANT APPLICATIONS FROM THE AWESOME POWER OF THE MAJESTIC GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Francis Andersen: The speech is in two parts.

- First there is a sarcastic response to Bildad's dismal last speech (**verses 2–4**).
- Then there is a magnificent description of God's power in creation (**5–14**).

Elmer Smick: The controlling theme is indeed similar to Bildad's—**God's vast power**. Job takes up where Bildad left off. Bildad has used the theme to reduce sinful humans to the status of worms. Job wishes to correct what he sees as an unwarranted connection. He does not see God's power related to the possibility or impossibility of human reconciliation with God. Both men deal with the cosmos, but Job ends on a note that leaves humans standing before the mystery of God's power with unanswered questions (**v.14**), but not as a maggot (**25:6**).

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

John Trapp: The question may be asked: What place has this poetical tribute to the majesty of God in the argument of the book? Viewed simply as an effort to outdo and correct the utterance of Bildad the speech is not fully explained. We ask further: What is meant to be in Job's mind at this particular point in the discussion; whether he is secretly complaining that power and dominion so wide are not manifested in executing justice on earth, or, on the other hand, comforting himself with the thought that judgment will yet return to righteousness and the Most High be proved the All-just? The inquiry has special importance because, looking forward in the book, we find that when the voice of God is heard from the storm it proclaims His matchless power and incomparable wisdom.

At present it must suffice to say that Job is now made to come very near his final discovery that complete reliance upon Eloah is not simply the fate but the privilege of man. Fully to understand Divine providence is impossible, but it can be seen that One who is supreme in power and infinite in wisdom, responsible always to Himself for the exercise of His power, should have the complete confidence of His creatures. Of this truth Job lays hold; by strenuous thought he has forced his way almost through the

tangled forest, and he is a type of man at his best on the natural plane. The world waited for the clear light which solves the difficulties of faith. While once and again a flash came before Christ, He brought the abiding revelation, the dayspring from on high which giveth light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB RESPONDS

“Then Job responded,”

I. (:2-4) SARCASTICALLY MOCKING THE WORTHLESS COUNSEL OF BILDAD

Tremper Longman: Job begins his next speech by sarcastically characterizing the speeches of his friends. From the very beginning, he has made clear that his friends are unreliable as counselors. They are worse than ineffective; they have actually intensified his problems. They are absolutely no help. Though they claim to come with authority, they really have let him down (**vv. 2-4**).

Elmer Smick: Bildad has struck a most sensitive nerve. In all Job’s speeches nothing has been more important to him than his determination to be vindicated, to be shown blameless, in God’s tribunal (**10:1–7; 13:3, 13–19; 16:18–21; 19:23–27; 23:2–7**). Bildad has just labeled that impossible. Job cannot restrain himself. He levels a sarcastic reply directly at the speaker (Hebrew second singular). He has nothing but contempt for Bildad’s wisdom. In his colorful, ironic exclamations, Job considers himself powerless, feeble, and without wisdom, but not a maggot (**vv.2–4**). If Bildad would only impute to him the **dignity** every human being deserves, he could have some compassion. The RSV (continued in the NRSV) already caught this ironic tone departing from the question format in the KJV (LXX). Understanding **vv.2–3** as **sarcasm** makes Job’s question about the source of such wisdom equally tongue-in-cheek.

Stan Anderson: Job is frustrated with all of them. In effect he says, “Thanks for nothing.” He hurls a series of sarcastic questions like barbed arrows:

- How have you helped me in my weakness?
- How have you consoled me in my confusion?
- Do you realize that an evil spirit is controlling you?

Job describes them as “*miserable comforters*” and “*physicians of no value.*”

Instead of helping him, these friends only made matters worse. They said many words, but none of those words blessed him. Instead of blessing him, they blasted him and burdened him. He questioned whose spirit spoke through them (**vs. 4**), suggesting that Satan may have inspired them instead of God.

3 CHARACTERIZATIONS OF WORTHLESS COUNSEL

A. (:2) Powerless to Help the Weak

“What a help you are to the weak!

How you have saved the arm without strength!”

John Hartley: These verses contain Job’s harshest rejection of a friend’s counsel. Job uses the second person masculine **singular** form here, whereas in his other speeches he used second person masculine plural forms in addressing the friends as a group. Perhaps he is singling out Bildad for this series of harsh rhetorical questions because he has reiterated the position of each of the other comforters.

David Guzik: *How have you helped him who is without power:* Job considered all the wisdom from Bildad and his two friends (Eliphaz and Zophar), and wondered where the help or strength was in any of it.

At the end of it all, Job’s friends got to the point where they were so concerned about being right that they forgot to be concerned about helping Job.

B. (:3) Devoid of Helpful Wisdom or Insight

“What counsel you have given to one without wisdom!

What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!”

C. (:4) Lacks Divine Authority

“To whom have you uttered words?

And whose spirit was expressed through you?”

John Hartley: By asking the **source of his inspiration** Job is questioning the value of his instruction. The *breath* (*nešāmā*) is the principle of human life that is given by God (Gen. 2:7; Job 33:4). It may also stand for divine inspiration that stirs up special insight deep inside a person (cf. **32:8**). Job, however, does not find that Bildad has any special wisdom from outside his own thinking that will help him overcome his difficulties. In fact, he has had to resort to quoting from the other friends to fill out his third speech. Therefore, by rejecting Bildad’s instruction as lacking in encouragement and in wisdom at this point, Job is rejecting all the discourse of the comforters as worthless.

David Guzik: *Whose spirit came from you:* In the very first speech of Job’s friends (**Job 4**), Eliphaz said that a **mysterious spirit** had revealed to him his principles. The message from the shadowy spirit began, *Can a mortal be more righteous than his God?* (**Job 4:17**). Bildad then repeated the same idea to Job in **Job 25:4**, as well as other recycled arguments in that brief chapter. Therefore, Job wanted to know from Bildad: *Whose spirit came from you*, or as the New International Version has it, *Whose spirit spoke from your mouth?*

II. (:5-14) SINCERELY PRAISING THE MAJESTIC POWER OF GOD

A. (:5-6) Power over the Realm of the Dead

*“The departed spirits tremble
Under the waters and their inhabitants.
6 Naked is Sheol before Him
And Abaddon has no covering.”*

John Hartley: God, the Creator, has complete mastery over the **realm of the dead**, referred to by three names, *waters (mayim)*, Sheol, and Abaddon (*ʾabaddôn*). Sheol was thought to lie under the ocean and to be a murky, watery abode. Its inhabitants eked out a wretched, meager existence. They are called *shades (repāʾîm)*, for while they have existence and identity, they are weak and helpless. Even though Sheol is far away (**11:8**), dark (**17:13**), and sealed (7:9), no one can hide from God there. Sheol is naked before him, i.e., God knows all that happens there. Since there is no hiding from God in Sheol, its inhabitants tremble in dread of his presence.

Elmer Smick: The thrust of these verses is that there is **no place hidden from God**. Job’s remark is an emphatic rejoinder to Bildad’s statement (**25:3**) that the light of God shines on everyone. Job heightens the observation dramatically by drawing attention to the searching eye of God from which even Sheol (**Johnston**, *Shades of Sheol*, 69–98) and Abaddon (from the Hebrew word “*Destruction*”; see Note) provide no hiding place. The proverbist, whose purpose is different from Job’s, takes it a step further: “*Death and Destruction lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of men!*” (**Pr 15:11**).

Kim Kuhfuss: **Sheol** -- understood three ways –

- 1) Lower parts of earth
- 2) Grave – **Ps. 16:10**
- 3) Place of torment- **Ps. 139:8; Rev. 14:10**

Also understood as: Hell = destruction and place of no escape- **Hebrews 2:3**

B. (:7-10) Power over Creation as God Exercises Control

Mike Waters: God tells us two things about Himself within the book of creation—

- He’s **outside of creation** and
- **concerned with creation** (both of these reveal the majesty of God).

(a) He is **outside of creation**—this means, the fact of creation argues its Creator is distinct from creation. . . The fact of creation argues that its Creator existed prior to it—that He existed before all that we see.

(b) He is **concerned with creation**—He’s both outside of creation and yet, intimately concerned with it. This is contrary to the error of Deism, which basically believes, God remains detached from creation. Deism affirms that God made creation, but it denies that He continues to be intimately concerned with creation. But again this is contrary to **Job 26**, for here we learn He fills the clouds with water and stirs up the sea with His power. This is called God’s **providence** and basically includes two things—preservation (whereby He sustains everything) and governance (whereby He directs

everything). Thus, Job focuses on both—God not only created all things in six days, but He sustains and governs it. Every single atom is upheld by His mighty power, every storm is governed by His power and wisdom.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=32821163533616>

1. (:7) Control over All Creation = Summary Statement

*“He stretches out the north over empty space,
And hangs the earth on nothing.”*

John Hartley: God, like a sheikh pitching a tent, created the world.

Tremper Longman: According to Job, God is not only sovereign over the underworld; he is also in charge of the rest of the cosmos. Using **creation language** (*stretches out, hangs*), Job talks about how God brought about Zaphon and the earth out of nothing (v. 7). Zaphon is a reference to the mythological mountain where the gods dwell. In a sense, the move from the underworld to Zaphon is a way of saying that God is in control of heaven and earth and everything in between. He did, after all, bring the earth out of nothing, and so **he controls everything**.

David Guzik: *He hangs the earth on nothing*: Job remarkably understood this. In contrast to ancient mythologies that said the earth was held up on the backs of elephants or giant turtles, Job knew that He hangs the earth on nothing.

Chuck Smith: Interesting statement, indeed, in that Job is one of the oldest books in the Bible, probably as old as the book of Genesis, maybe even older; it could have been written before Genesis. And Job declares that God *hangs the earth upon nothing*. Now compare that with the scientific theories of those days, the men of science in those days. The wise men had drawn pictures of the earth being held up by an elephant. Now I don't know what he was standing on. Or Atlas holding up the earth. But Job declares he hung it on nothing. Interesting indeed.

2. (:8) Control over the Clouds

*“He wraps up the waters in His clouds;
And the cloud does not burst under them.”*

John Hartley: Under the heavenly canopy God does many wonders. Amazingly he binds (*ṣōrēr*) some of the waters in thick clouds (‘*āḥīm*), as one stores wine in a wineskin. But the cloud mass (‘*ānān*) does not burst or split open under the great weight of the water. God protects the earth from being inundated by a cloudburst.

Elmer Smick: The fact that God can spread out the heavens over empty space, hang the earth on nothing, and fill the clouds with water without their bursting is intended to make us stand in awe (v.8). Job is boldly expressing in poetic terms the marvelous, majestic power of God. Those clouds, though they contain an impressive quantity of water, do not split and dump all the water at once. Even with today's scientific explanation of cloud formation in terms of temperature, pressure, condensation, etc.,

one is still moved to wonder at the extreme complexity and yet ingenious simplicity of such a phenomenon.

3. (:9) Control over the Display of His Glory

*“He obscures the face of the full moon,
And spreads His cloud over it.”*

John Hartley: *God encloses the sight of his throne in a cloud mass* (‘ānān; cf. **Ps. 97:2**). Since no creature can behold his glory and live, for it is too brilliant and awesome, these clouds protect his creatures from being consumed by the glory.

Elmer Smick: Does God cover the face of “*his throne*” or “*the full moon*”? If the text is speaking of God’s throne, then this line can be tied to God’s appearance in the storm (**38:1**). God uses the clouds to enshroud him in his lofty abode (**Ps 104:3–13; Am 9:6**). He appears in heaven in golden splendor and awesome majesty. But people can no more look at him directly than they can the sun (**37:21–22**). So the clouds must cover the face of his throne—an apt word picture of a theophany.

4. (:10) Control over the Separation of Light and Darkness

*“He has inscribed a circle on the surface of the waters,
At the boundary of light and darkness.”*

John Hartley: At the end of the sea’s waters God drew a boundary line, the **horizon**, to divide the light from the darkness. The horizon is located at the farthest limits. This line divides the light that shines on the cosmos from the darkness that inhabits the watery chaos.

C. (:11-13) Power over Chaotic Cosmic Forces

Tremper Longman: **Verses 11–13** then speak again of the effect of his greatness and power on the cosmos and its inhabitants. The very pillars that separate the earth from the heavens quake when he issues his rebuke. The pillars that hold up the heavens would be seen as extremely formidable, and that God can make them quake indicates the immensity of his power. In **v. 12** Job speaks of the Sea as a mythological power, representing hostile powers. In ancient Canaan, the Sea (Yam) was a god who assumed the kingship of the pantheon and was resisted by Baal, who defeated and subdued him. The stilling of the Sea shows **God’s power over the forces of chaos**. Rahab is a mythological creature that inhabits the sea and thus provides a good parallel to Yam (Sea). The reference to God’s defeat of Rahab may hark back to the myth that God defeats the sea monster that represents chaos.

1. (:11) Over the Pillars of Heaven

*“The pillars of heaven tremble,
And are amazed at His rebuke.”*

John Hartley: Whenever God appears in anger, the *pillars of heaven*, possibly the distant mountains on the horizon that support the huge canopy of the sky, shake violently. The phrase *at his rebuke* (*ge'ārā*) describes God's command to bring into subjection those cosmic forces hostile to his rule.

Elmer Smick: The thought was common in the ancient world that the earth shook at its foundations when God expressed his anger (**Ps 18:7, 15; Isa 2:19, 21; 13:13; Eze 38:19**; et al.). Such phenomenological language was based on volcanoes and earthquakes. The force exerted by a thunderclap (**Ps 77:18**) is perceived as “*the blast of the breath from your [God's] nostrils*” (**Ps 18:15**).

2. (:12-13) Over the Sea, the Heavens and All Mythical Foes

*“He quieted the sea with His power,
And by His understanding He shattered Rahab.
By His breath the heavens are cleared;
His hand has pierced the fleeing serpent.”*

Poole: The sea, which is fitly called proud, as its waves are called, **Job 38:11**, because it is lofty, and fierce, and swelling, and unruly; which God is said to smite when he subdues and restrains its rage, and turns the storm into a calm.

Derek Kidner: God is sovereign over every imaginable enemy and foe, even “*Rahab*” (**26:12**; cf. **9:13**) and “*the gliding serpent*” (**26:13**, a possible reference to Leviathan).

John Hartley: God overcame these foes by his power and by his insight (**v. 12**), even by his wind and his hand (**v. 13**). These words for God's instruments in defeating his foes are chiastically arranged:

God's power (**v. 12a**)
 is visible in his hand (**v. 13b**),
and his insight or wisdom (**v. 12b**)
 is manifest in his wind or breath (**v. 13a**).

Usually in ancient Near Eastern mythologies the god of wisdom is distinguished from the god of power. Because these two qualities do not exist in a single god of the pantheon, there is no god that is able to accomplish his full intentions. In contrast, the God of Scripture possesses both qualities supremely. There is no other cosmic being that is his equal in any way.

D. (:14) Power Beyond Our Imagination (cf. Eph. 3:20)

*“Behold, these are the fringes of His ways;
And how faint a word we hear of Him!
But His mighty thunder, who can understand?”*

Tremper Longman: Job then ends his description of God's great creative power, which stands over against anti-creation forces represented by various mythological images, by

saying that this is just the **tip of the iceberg**. God's power is ultimately mysterious and far more extensive than Job suggests. We do not hear a full report of his doings; so we have only a partial picture of who he is and his power (*"the fringes of his way"*).

John Hartley: The mighty acts of God are merely the **outskirts** or the **extremities** of his ways. In a theophany a person hears but a whisper of God's ways. If the wonders of creation are far too marvelous for mankind to comprehend, it is just as impossible for a human being to comprehend the thunder of his power. At best a human being catches only a glimpse of God's marvelous ways.

David Guzik: Job understood a lot about God; but He understood enough to know there was far more than he did not understand.

Stan Anderson: God is greater than you think. **J. B. Phillips** wrote a book entitled, *Your God is Too Small*. God is not actually small, but He is too small in people's minds. **A. W. Tozer** was right when he said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

Elmer Smick: For Job these manifestations and deeds are but mere shadows or whispers of the smallest part of God's might. We stand merely at the fringe of his majestic power. Who among us can even begin to comprehend this fully, let alone fully realize the thunderous might of which he is capable? How beautifully and humbly Job asserts the majestic omnipotence of God! But he ends the poem convinced of the mystery that surrounds that omnipotence.

Ray Stedman: Once again he goes on to state the majesty of God in a brilliant and moving passage, and he closes with this word in **verse 14**: *And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?* What he says is simply that there is a mystery in God that no human can plumb. Even when we have understood something of the greatness of His wisdom and majesty in nature—when we have learned of His omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, and we know that as part of our theology—it still does not explain all of His ways.

I am reminded of a verse from **Robert Browning's** poem "*Bishop Blougram's Apology*," where the poet describes an arrogant young man who has worked out all his theology so that God is carefully boxed in. He believes he knows the answers to all the theological riddles of life; there is no place for God in it. He can handle it all himself. He comes to an old bishop and tells him he does not need God any longer; he is committed to his unbelief. The old bishop warns him:

*"Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears...
The Grand Perhaps."*

What he means is that just when you think you have God all worked out, something happens that you can't handle—it doesn't fit your box. You see a sunset that is so moving that it awakens depths in you that you can't explain. Someone dies, and you don't know how to handle it. You see a flower, and you are touched by it. You listen to a chorus-ending from Euripides, and it moves you in such a strange way, it doesn't fit the facts. And in all these ways God is breaking through into our lives—**the grand perhaps**, and that's enough for fifty hopes and fears—**the great mystery of God**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How did both Bildad and Job take the same theology regarding the awesome power of the majestic God and arrive at very **different points of application**?
- 2) How should you be able to recognize **worthless counsel**?
- 3) Why does Job make mention of mythological figures and elements from the creation stories of other ancient peoples instead of just sticking to the account of **Genesis 1-2**?
- 4) Why is it important to admit that despite all that God has revealed about His attributes (such as His power) there is still far more that we don't understand yet?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

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

Warren Wiersbe: Before magnifying God's great power in the universe, Job first rebuked Bildad for giving him no help (:1-4). . .

Then Job extolled the **greatness of God (vv. 5-13)**; God sees everything, even the realm of the dead (**vv. 5-6**). Job used three different names for the place of the dead: the waters, Sheol, and “*destruction*” (Abaddon, **Rev. 9:11**). If God sees what's going on in the world of the dead, then surely He knows what is happening in the world of the living!

God not only sees everything, but He made everything and controls it (:7-13). Job began his hymn of praise with a statement about God's power in *the heavens* (vv. 7-9), and he described the earth with remarkable scientific accuracy (v. 7). God also controls the clouds and the rain.

Job then moved his attention to *the earth* (vv. 10-11) and praised God for marking out the horizon where the sun rises and sets. He is the God who controls day and night, land and water. The "*pillar of heaven*" is a poetic phrase for the mountains; they rest on earth, but they seem to build up the heavens. All God has to do is speak, and the mountains tremble (9:6).

The last stanza of Job's hymn centers on God's power in *the waters* (:12-13). God can stir up the sea or still it as He desires, and He has power over sea creatures ("*Rahab*" and "*the gliding serpent*," NIV). He can blow the storm clouds away and clear the sky after the storm. . .

The fourteenth-century British spiritual writer **Richard Rolle** said, "He truly knows God perfectly that finds Him incomprehensible and unable to be known." The more we learn about God, the more we discover how much more there is to know! Beware of people who claim to know all about God, for their claim is proof they know neither God nor themselves.

Stan Anderson: No one can understand the fullness of God's power and majesty. He is beyond our ability to comprehend. How can a finite person understand the infinite God? Our minds cannot conceive His greatness. We only have a glimpse of His glory, but that's enough. **Augustine** was walking along the beach thinking about the nature of God and the truth of the Trinity. He couldn't fully understand it, and he was tempted to reject it. Then he saw a little boy playing on the beach running to the ocean with a small seashell. The boy filled up the seashell with water and then walked back to a little hole he had dug in the sand. Augustine asked, "What are you doing, little fellow?" The boy replied, "I'm trying to put the ocean into this hole." Then Augustine realized that he was trying to do the same thing with God. He was trying to get the infinite things of God into his little mind, and they just wouldn't fit.

When we come to the place where Job was, when we realize just how great God is and that we only see a glimpse of his glory, then we truly begin to worship. If you could figure God out entirely, He wouldn't be God.

There's something else we ought to get from Job here in this chapter. Our head knowledge should lead to heart worship. What we do know about God ought to make us marvel at all we don't know. We ought to have a sense of awe and wonder in worship.

A few years ago *Mercy Me* came out with that song, *I Can Only Imagine*. It talks about how we can only imagine what Heaven will be like. We can only imagine what God is like. Since God is greater than you think...

- Humble yourself before Him
- Do what He says
- Worship Him as He deserves
- Trust Him for every need

TEXT: Job 27:1-23

TITLE: JOB'S FIRST MONOLOGUE – STICKS TO HIS GUNS – STAYS ON MESSAGE

BIG IDEA:

JOB REAFFIRMS HIS RIGHTEOUS INTEGRITY, THE VANITY OF HYPOCRISY AND THE DOOMED DESTINY OF THE WICKED

INTRODUCTION:

Derek Kidner: Commentators are in disagreement as to whose words recorded in **chapters 25-28**. Some are of the opinion that Bildad's speech, having ended at the close of **chapter 25**, takes up again at **26:5-14**. Some also believe that chapter **27:2-12** is Job's reply, but that the rest of chapters **27** and **28** is not from Job at all!

Since Zophar has not intervened, Job continues to speak to all the friends in **27:1 – 28:28**: the "you" in **verses 11-12** is plural, so Job is not merely replying to Bildad here.

This is **Job's closing discourse** to the friends. He has one more speech (like the closing argument in a trial case) addressed to God (**29-31**) and once this section is over, Job only has a few short sentences left to speak by way of an epilogue at the very end of the book (**42:2-6**).

Edward Gibson: Accepting then the arrangement of the text which has come down to us in our Hebrew Bibles as correct, and regarding **xxviii.** as an integral part of the original poem, the two chapters before us (**xxvii., xxviii.**) are here treated as **Job's first monologue**. Job has now completely silenced his friends. He has appealed to facts which give the lie to the major premise of their syllogism, and establish the seeming inequality of God's ways. He is consequently left as victor, not as having solved the problem, or offered any explanation of the mystery of pain, but simply as having demolished their 'short and easy method' of accounting for suffering. Whatever be the true account of it, the old doctrine of retribution has hopelessly broken down; and it appears as if this monologue was meant to point out that since the problem is insoluble by man his true wisdom is to acquiesce in his ignorance, and, leaving speculation, to devote himself to practical works of goodness: much in the same spirit as the writer of Ecclesiastes gives '*the conclusion of the whole matter*' at the close of his dreary reflections on things in general. '*Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*' (**Eccl. xii. 13**).

John Hartley: Job sings the praises of God's glorious might and affirms once again, with even more determination, his own uprightness. His sublime view of God impels him to continue reaching out to God as the one who will restore his honor, even though God himself appears to be the cause of his bitter affliction. His genuine faith is grounded in his conviction that God is just and merciful despite the evidence to the

contrary. The other pillar that keeps his faith from being swallowed up by fear is his assurance that he is blameless. In using an oath form to assert his integrity he has come close to his final course of action, swearing an avowal of innocence (**ch. 31**). Then out of distress, hoping to end his agony, Job prays that the causes of his affliction, personified as an enemy, will be defeated by the mighty God who defeats all his foes.

Francis Andersen: The disagreement between Job and his friends is not over whether God is just or not; it is over how the justice of God is seen to work out in particular events, and specifically in Job's experiences. The friends think they know the answer, and they have offered it to Job. Job knows that they are wrong, not in affirming the justice of God, but in applying it to himself. But since he does not know how the justice of God is being fulfilled in his case, he is neither able to refute the friends nor able to satisfy his own mind.

Joseph Benson:

- Job protests his integrity, **Job 27:1-6** ;
- and his dread of hypocrisy, **Job 27:7-10** .
- Shows the miserable end of the wicked, notwithstanding their long prosperity, **Job 27:11-23**.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB'S FIRST MONOLOGUE

"Then Job continued his discourse and said,"

THREE REAFFIRMATIONS:

I. (:2-6) CONTINUING TO CLAIM RIGHTEOUS INTEGRITY

Tremper Longman: There has been no softening of Job's position. He is as confident as ever of his righteousness and that God is unjust to let him suffer.

Elmer Smick: An oath based on the existence of God is the most extreme measure available (the last resort) in Job's society for a condemned person to plead innocent. Either he is innocent, or he will suffer the divine sanctions; for if Job is a liar, he has blasphemed God. He is saying that his integrity (blamelessness, not sinlessness) is more important to him than life itself (**v.5**).

But Job does not fear death, for he has spoken the truth. He knows he can swear before God without forfeiting his life. He feels God has denied him justice but inconsistently still knows that somehow God is just; so he can swear by his life. This same **incongruity** applies also to his earlier fantasies, when with highly emotional words he viewed God as his enemy (**9:14–31; 16:7–14; 19:7–12**).

The Biblical Illustrator:

I. A solemn asseveration. "*As God liveth.*" (:2) The words imply a belief--

1. In the reality of the Divine existence. Whilst some deny this fact, the bulk of

the race practically ignore it.

2. In the awfulness of the Divine existence. There is a sublime awfulness in the words, "*As God liveth.*"

3. In the severity of the Divine existence. "*Who hath taken away my judgment, and the Almighty who hath vexed my soul.*" As nature has winter as well as summer, so God has a severe as well as a benign aspect.

4. In the nearness of the Divine existence. "*The spirit of God is in my nostrils. His breath is my life.*"

II. A noble determination. "*My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*" (:4-6) What does he determine?

1. Never to swerve from rectitude. "*Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go.*" Whatever happens to me, I will not play the false, I will not be insincere. No one can rob me of my integrity.

2. Never to vindicate wickedness. Job has so many times alluded to the prosperity of the wicked that he is apprehensive he may be suspected of envying their lot, and wishing to be in their place. Great is the tendency of some men to vindicate wickedness in connection with wealth and worldly power.

III. A weighty reflection. "*What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him*"? (:8-10) The writer reflects here upon the wicked men of wealth, and he concludes--

1. That in death they will have no hope.

2. That in trouble they will have no answer to their prayers or delight in God.

E.S.P. Heavenor: Job again repudiates the charges insinuated or directly affirmed by his friends. (2) His affirmation is introduced by what **Strahan** calls "the most extraordinary form of oath in the Scriptures". He swears by a God *who has taken away his right*. It is a remarkable picture of a man whose faith is abiding with him in the storm, who still can call "*my God*" the God he is tempted to imagine is forsaking him. (5, 6) He cannot doubt the reality of almighty God, or the fact of His government of the world; it is the mode of His government, and in particular its application to himself, which puzzles him. The present vexations cannot be explained by his sinfulness.

A. (:2-4) Integrity Confirmed by an Unwavering Oath

John Hartley: Job resolutely affirms his innocence with a **complex oath**. It opens with an oath formula (v. 2a, c), expanded by an accusation against God contained in a relative clause (v. 2b-2d), plus a parenthetical statement that God is the source of his life (v. 3), and then the oath proper asserting that he has not lied at all in his affirmations of innocence (v. 4).

1. (:2) Appeal to the Very God Who Has Sovereignly Afflicted Him

*“As God lives, who has taken away my right,
And the Almighty, who has embittered my soul,”*

Mason: The juxtaposition is jarringly ironic. Even as Job confesses his faith in the living God, he matter-of-factly accuses this God of deserting him, of leaving him in the lurch... Job does not say, ‘as I live,’ but ‘*as God lives*,’ even though this God has hidden His face and denied him justice.

Elmer Smick: He felt God had denied him justice but inconsistently still knew that somehow God was just; so he could swear by his life. This same incongruity applies also to his earlier fantasies, when with highly emotional words he viewed God as his enemy.

John Hartley: Daringly Job adds a complaint against God after the opening formula. He accuses the very God by whom he swears of two offenses: God has denied or set aside (*hēsîr*) his right, and Shaddai has made his soul bitter. Since God has refused to answer his pleas to resolve his case, he has had to cope with resentment against God welling up within himself. These words suggest that two views of God are struggling against each other in Job’s thinking: God his accuser and God the source of justice. Job is pitting God against himself in a mighty effort to compel God to answer his complaint. Both his contention and his wishful hope of resolution are with this same God.

Derek Kidner: God may ask us to pass through similar valleys to Job, and we shall need to be as patient as Job was if we are to emerge as he did. **Holding on to God**, even when his ways appear to make no sense, is the secret of Job’s life. Job may well have problems with seeing god’s justice in his life: “*God . . . has denied me justice*” (27:2); but everything in him says that to abandon God now would be suicidal. He must hold on, even when it makes no sense. In all his searching for meaning and purpose, Job is discovering that there is no one else to whom he may turn.

Albert Barnes: Who hath rejected my cause, or who has refused me justice; that is, who has treated me as though I was guilty, and withholds from me relief. The language is forensic, and the idea is, that he would make his solemn appeal to him, even though he had rejected his cause. Perhaps there is implied here more than the solemnity of an ordinary oath. A man might be supposed to be willing to make his appeal to one who had shown himself friendly or favorable to him, but he would manifest more reluctance to making his appeal in an important case to a judge who had decided against him, especially if that decision was regarded as severe, and if that judge had refused to hear what he had to say in self-defense. But Job here says, that such was his confidence in his own sincerity and truth, that he could make his appeal to God, even though he knew that he had hitherto gone against him, and treated him as if he were guilty.

2. (:3) Attribution of His Life to God’s Preservation

*“For as long as life is in me,
And the breath of God is in my nostrils,”*

John Hartley: Job acknowledges parenthetically that it is the living God who has given him the breath of life (cf. **Gen. 2:7; Isa. 42:5**). God both imparts life to the body and sustains that life. In this statement Job acknowledges his complete dependence on God. At the same time he believes that God, by reason of the fact that he is the giver of life, is obligated to judge each person justly, including Job. Job's double confidence—in his own integrity and in God's fidelity to justice—moves him to speak so brazenly.

David Thompson: Job believed totally and completely in the **sovereignty of God**. He believed that God was allowing these things to happen to him for some reason. Even though he was experiencing horrible things, he still kept his faith in God and held to some key theological realities:

(Reality #1) - God is a living God. 27:2a

Just because things had gone bad for Job, he did not take a “God is dead” view of life. That is the way many people think. They look at bad things that are happening and start questioning God or doubting God or denying God. Job never did that. He always believed that God was a living God. He could help. He could intervene. He has a plan.

(Reality #2) - God is the One who has taken rights away from Job. 27:2b

God was the One who had taken away “*my right*.” What Job means by that is for some reason God had determined that the right of Job to be blessed because he was faithful to God had been taken away. What was happening to Job had robbed him of his rights. Job believed all the negative things that hit him came as a result of a sovereign decree of God.

(Reality #3) - God is the One who has caused his soul to become embittered. 27:2c

Job's soul was troubled. Job was hurting outside and inside and he believed God had done this. God was the One who was causing Job to have such an emotional breakdown.

(Reality #4) - God is the One who continues to give Job life. 27:3

Job believed that the reason he had not died yet was because God continued to give him life. Job continued to believe that God was the one sustaining his life even though he was going through great suffering. God not only gives life, but He also sustains life. Job's grasp of the sovereignty of God is amazing.

These four sovereign realities about God were things Job thought about. These are four realities we need to think about when our world caves in.

3. (:4) Avoidance of Any Impropriety or Deceit

*“My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.”*

B. (:5-6) Integrity Clutched Tightly until Death

*“Far be it from me that I should declare you right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go.
My heart does not reproach any of my days.”*

John Hartley: The foundation of Job’s faith in God is his personal conviction that he has been blameless in his relations with God and human beings. This verse is a direct allusion to **2:3**, in which God confesses Job’s integrity after his losses (cf. **2:9; 31:6**). If Job would concede to the friends that he was suffering for some wrong he had committed, he would destroy the central fiber of his stalwart moral character, for he would be seeking their approval by speaking a lie.

II. (:7-12) CURSING AND COUNSELING HYPOCRITES

A. (:7-10) Cursing His Enemies

1. (:7) Imprecation

*“May my enemy be as the wicked,
And my opponent as the unjust.”*

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

Warren Wiersbe: Who were Job’s **enemies**? Anybody who agreed with Job’s three friends that he was guilty of sin and deserved to be punished by God. While this conversation had been going on, many people had likely gathered around the ash heap and listened to the debate; and most of them probably sided with Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz. Job could see the spectators nod their heads in agreement with his friends, and he knew that he was outnumbered.

2. (:8-10) Inconsistencies of Hypocrites Exposed – Their Hope is Vain

*“For what is the hope of the godless when he is cut off,
When God requires his life?
9 Will God hear his cry, when distress comes upon him?
10 Will he take delight in the Almighty,
Will he call on God at all times?”*

David Guzik: Job was accused by his friends of being a hypocrite; of clinging to hidden sin instead of confessing and repenting. Here, Job agreed that the **hope of the hypocrite was vain**.

John Hartley: When distress comes on the evildoer as punishment, he may cry out to God for help, but God will not hear his cry. God refuses to deliver him because such a person calls on God solely to get out of a desperate condition. That person will experience the full brunt of the misfortune designed to punish him, for he has no intention of delighting in God by doing his will. Only those with a broken spirit have a genuine hope of deliverance from God (cf. **Ps. 86:1–3**).

Cyril Barber: Then, as he continued with his defense of his actions, he contrasted himself with the wicked, and named five ways in which his life was distinct from theirs:

- (1) He had repudiated the godless (even though this is the group in which his friends have classified him);
- (2) He believed that when God takes away the life of the wicked, they have no hope;
- (3) He had observed that when the wicked find themselves beset by trouble they have no communication with God, whereas Job believed that he has a mediator between himself and the Most High;
- (4) Job also believed that the wicked have not delight in fellowship with God, and only call on Him in times of trouble; and,
- (5) The wicked cannot teach others about God because they do not know Him, whereas Job is ready and able to teach his friends about God's ways.

B. (:11-12) Counseling His Counselors

1. (:11) Instruction

*"I will instruct you in the power of God;
What is with the Almighty I will not conceal."*

Morgan: Summoning all the strength of his faith, he declared that he would teach his opponents '*concerning the hand of God,*' and he now practically took hold of all that they had said about God's visitation on the wicked, and hurled it back on them as an anathema.

John MacArthur: Job had pinpointed the issue between him and his friends. They disagreed on the outworking of God's retribution. They agreed that God was powerful, wise, and sovereign. But because Job knew there was no cherished sin in his life that would bring upon him such intense suffering, Job was forced to conclude that the simplistic notion – that all suffering comes from sin and all righteousness is rewarded – was wrong. At the outset, Job himself probably believed as the comforters still did, but he had seen that his friends' limitation of God's action was drastically in need of revision; in fact, it was nonsense. Job's comments here introduced his exposition on wisdom which follows in **Job 28**.

2. (:12) Inconsistencies of His Counselors Exposed – Their Arguments Contradict Reality

*"Behold, all of you have seen it;
Why then do you act foolishly?"*

Tremper Longman: He insults them in v. 12 by suggesting that his lesson is obvious. They should know it without him telling them about it. Because of their ignorance, they have become meaningless, which probably means that their arguments lack substance. The word “*meaningless*” (*hebel*), well known from Ecclesiastes, has as a base meaning “*vapor*” or “*bubble*.” Their arguments are vaporous.

Albert Barnes: Why is it that you maintain such opinions - that you evince no more knowledge of his government and plans - that you argue so inconclusively about him and his administration! Why, since you have had an opportunity of observing the course of events, do you maintain that suffering is necessarily a proof of guilt, and that God deals with all people, in this life, according to their character? A close observation of the course of events would have taught you otherwise. Job proceeds to state what he supposes to be the exact truth on the subject, and particularly aims, in the following chapter, to show that the ways of God are inscrutable, and that we cannot be expected to comprehend them, and are not competent to pronounce upon them.

III. (:13-23) CALLING OUT THE DOOMED DESTINY OF THE WICKED

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

David Guzik: In this section, Job argued strongly – as strongly as any of his three friends – that **judgment awaits the wicked man**, and that he will not be ultimately blessed. This was an important argument for Job to make in front of his friends, because they accused him of overturning God’s moral order in the world. Job insists that he agreed (in general) with the idea that wickedness is rewarded with judgment from God (received from the Almighty).

Francis Andersen: The disagreement between Job and his friends is not over whether God is just or not; it is over how the justice of God is seen to work out in particular events, and specifically in Job’s experiences.

(:13) Introduction

*“This is the portion of a wicked man from God,
And the inheritance which tyrants receive from the Almighty.”*

A. (:14-15) Doomed Family Destiny

1. (:14) Sons and Descendants

*“Though his sons are many, they are destined for the sword;
And his descendants will not be satisfied with bread.”*

2. (:15) Survivors and Their Widows

*“His survivors will be buried because of the plague,
And their widows will not be able to weep.”*

B. (:16-17) Doomed Material Treasures

*“Though he piles up silver like dust,
And prepares garments as plentiful as the clay;
17 He may prepare it, but the just will wear it,
And the innocent will divide the silver.”*

C. (:18-23) Doomed Dwellings of False Safety and Security

1. (:18-19) Rapid Reversal of Fortune

a. (:18) Temporary Nature of His Dwelling

*“He has built his house like the spider's web,
Or as a hut which the watchman has made.”*

John MacArthur: temporary dwellings which illustrate that the wicked will not live long.

b. (:19) Quick Demise

*“He lies down rich, but never again;
He opens his eyes, and it is no more.”*

2. (:20-22) Impossibility of Escape

“Terrors overtake him like a flood; A tempest steals him away in the night. 21 The east wind carries him away, and he is gone, For it whirls him away from his place. 22 For it will hurl at him without sparing; He will surely try to flee from its power.”

3. (:23) Object of Derision

*“Men will clap their hands at him,
And will hiss him from his place.”*

Cf. the hissing by rival soccer fans to express their displeasure; Is God the one doing the hissing here?

Adam Clarke: It seems it was an ancient method to clap the hands against and hiss a man from any public office, who had acted improperly in it. The populace, in European countries, express their disapprobation of public characters who have not pleased them in the same manner to the present day, by hisses, groans, and the like.

Francis Andersen: The practice of Hebrew poets of using the opening and closing lines of a poem as a framework (*inclusio*) to enclose the rest invites us to link **verse 23** with **verse 13**, and to **identify God** (not the east wind—it of RSV) as the One behind all these calamities, who claps his palms and hisses at him. While clapping can express

anger (**Num. 24:10**), and hissing can express horror (**Jer. 49:17**), both can express derision (**Lam. 2:15; Ezek. 27:36**), which is often mentioned in the Old Testament as the best treatment for the ungodly.

Elmer Smick: The stanza has an *inclusio* structure; that is, the opening and closing lines answer to each other. But this can only be seen when two items in **v.23** are understood. First, the verbs and pronoun should be taken as third masculine singular. The reference is to God in **v.13**, not to the storm in the preceding verse. Second, “*his place*” at the end of **v.23** means “*heaven*,” God’s place. Both prepositions in the Hebrew text, then, make sense. The verse reads: “*He claps his hands against them and hisses at them from his dwelling [heaven]*”

Warren Wiersbe: Whether God or men, there is rejoicing at the destruction of the wicked.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does integrity look like in your life and how can you confidently maintain it?
- 2) How did Job’s counselors prove to be hypocrites and how did Job differentiate his conduct from that of hypocrites?
- 3) How quickly have you seen the fortunes of the wicked overturned or their lives quickly terminated at the height of their prosperity?
- 4) When is it futile to continue back-and-forth debating?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

McGee: We can sum up the methods of his friends.

- Eliphaz was the voice of **experience**. He used what would be called today the psychological approach. This is the approach of the power of positive thinking. It adopts a cheerful attitude.
- Bildad was the **traditionalist** and he used the philosophical approach. This would be the approach of several of the seminaries today. They use the philosophical approach, but that doesn't help anyone.
- Zophar was a **religious dogmatist**. He thought he knew all about God. He sounds like some of us fundamentalists, by the way.

All of us would fall into the category of one of these friends. As we have seen, not one of his friends had been able to help him.

David Thompson: **Job 27** begins the first of two monologues which are absolutely majestic. The first monologue includes **chapters 27 and 28**, and the second includes **chapters 29 to 31**. Both begin with the Hebrew word “*discourse*,” which means Job is presenting an elevated verbal, picturesque monologue which **Frederic Godet** said is a “burst of poetry never surpassed.”

JOB CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN HIS INTEGRITY OF LIFE AND HIS EXALTED PERSPECTIVE OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND HE ALSO WARNED OF A FUTURE DESTRUCTION OF HIS WICKED ENEMIES.

Job defends himself, he defends the character of God and he warns the wicked. Now there are three main parts to this chapter:

PART #1 – Job defends his righteous integrity. **27:1-6**

PART #2 – Job rebukes those who oppose him. **27:7-12**

PART #3 – Job warns what God will ultimately do to the wicked. **27:13-23**

Charles Swindoll: Job’s Main Priorities

- Thinking God’s thoughts is our highest goal. Job’s **vertical perspective** quickly emerges . . . he refers to the name of his God no less than eleven times (:2-13)
- Walking in **integrity** is the only way to live. (:3-5)
- Wrong will occur but it will not ultimately triumph. That brings a sense of **justice**. (:13-17)
- Seeking wisdom through **human effort** is a waste of time. (28:12-15)
- Cultivating a healthy and holy **fear of the Lord** gives us wisdom and understanding. (28:23-28)

Derek Kidner: Have you grown a little tired of all the arguments put forth so far? There has been a certain sameness to the speeches. Hardly anything that Job’s three friends have been saying has been of any real value (and these have taken nine of the first twenty-seven chapters). The three counsellors have insisted that Job is in the wrong and is suffering for it. Job has insisted that he is not in the wrong at all, but that God’s treatment of him has been wrong. It has been increasingly difficult to maintain Job’s integrity. Job has protested his innocence too much. As time has gone on, Job’s health has been steadily deteriorating; his demeanour has shown less and less of the sanguine quality of the early chapters. . .

It is time for Job to cut himself free from these people and think for himself. It is time to reflect on his predicament in a new way. There are times in our trials to get alone with God and talk it out with him. The remedy for Job is to reflect again on the God who controls his life. The answers, if indeed there are any, are with him. It is time to shut one’s ears to the counsellors and think about God. It is here that healing comes to Job. It is the theme of the next chapter.

TEXT: Job 28:1-28

TITLE: WHERE SHALL WISDOM BE FOUND?

BIG IDEA:

WISDOM CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN COMMUNION WITH GOD BY DIVINE REVELATION AS WE FEAR HIM AND TURN AWAY FROM EVIL

INTRODUCTION:

David Atkinson: Job 28 is about Wisdom, human and divine. Many commentators regard this chapter as an addition to the flow of the text. Others see it as fulfilling a function rather like the chorus of a Greek drama – an opportunity to stand back and reflect how far we have come and how far there is still to go. Yet others understand the chapter as integral to a long speech of Job which runs from **chapter 26 to chapter 31**. On this third view, the theme of wisdom which we find in **26:3** (*‘What advice you have offered to one without wisdom!’*) and in **26:12**, is picked up and explored more fully and more theologically in **chapter 28**, with **chapter 27** coming in between as Job’s own personal commitment to the life which pleases God.

David Guzik: There are two good solutions. The better solution is to simply say that this is indeed **Job’s work**. “Why should it surprise us if Job, having exhausted all other avenues of protest and inquiry, should all at once slip quietly into a more reflective mood and begin meditating on the source of wisdom? Why shouldn’t Job grow strangely becalmed here for a time and contemplate his problems from a more traditional perspective?” (**Mason**)

The other solution is to say that this chapter is the inserted observation of the anonymous author of the Book of Job. **Andersen** describes this perspective: “Because we think that Job is a story, we find it appropriate that this **interlude** is spoken by the story-teller. It sums up the case as it stands at this point. It emphasizes the failure of the human mind to arrive at the hidden wisdom, and so, far from interfering with the Lord’s speeches, it lays the foundation for them by showing their necessity.”

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

Francis Andersen: This refrain, which comes in **verses 12 and 20**, divides the poem into three strophes:

- **verses 1–11** indicate that human research has not discovered wisdom;
- **verses 13–19** indicate that human wealth cannot purchase wisdom;

- **verses 21–27** declare that God alone has wisdom, which remains his gift.
- **verse 28** completes the poem with the classical definition of wisdom.

John Hartley: Here is a magnificent hymn in praise of wisdom. Wisdom is extolled as the noblest divine trait. God knows wisdom fully and employs it in all of his ways, but its abode is hidden from mankind.

This hymn consists of three pericopes plus a conclusion:

- human skill in mining technology (vv. 1–11);
- wisdom’s value, beyond purchase (vv. 12–19);
- God’s knowledge of wisdom (vv. 20–27);
- wisdom for mankind (v. 28).

(:1-2) INTRODUCTION – ALL TREASURE NEEDS TO BE MINED

*“Surely there is a mine for silver,
And a place where they refine gold.
2 Iron is taken from the dust,
And from rock copper is smelted.”*

Elmer Smick: Verses 1–2 state what appears to be a truism—**earth’s material riches have a source**. But these two verses accomplish a rhetorical purpose by asserting that humans are able to plumb the depths of the earth to discover precious metals and ores. They set the tone without explicitly stating the theme.

I. (:3-11) MINING FOR TREASURE REQUIRES IMPRESSIVE EFFORT – BUT STILL WISDOM CANNOT BE MINED

Francis Andersen: here the author expresses nothing but admiration for man’s industry and ingenuity. He draws his example from mining technology and gives us several pen-sketches of ancient engineers at work. Tribute is paid to their persistence and courage, for digging treasures from the earth is one of the most dangerous of occupations. There is a hint that the getting of wisdom will be equally strenuous and hazardous. There is no suggestion that the author is disapproving, as if he thought that the energies spent on the search for material wealth would be better used in the quest of wisdom. His point is much simpler. Man’s remarkable success as a miner shows how clever and intelligent he is; but, for all that, **he has failed completely to unearth wisdom**.

John Hartley: The theme in this section is that man has amazing creative ability to discover the gems hidden deep in the earth. As **Habel** (OTL) keenly observes, “The mining process is a paradigm for probing a mystery in the natural domain which parallels probing wisdom at a deeper level in the cosmic domain.”

Elmer Smick: These verses illustrate ancient people’s technological ability in mining.

Tremper Longman: Humans are capable of great feats, but wisdom is beyond them.

A. (:3-4) Mining Efforts Go to Great Lengths

*“Man puts an end to darkness,
And to the farthest limit he searches out the rock in gloom and deep shadow.
4 He sinks a shaft far from habitation, Forgotten by the foot;
They hang and swing to and fro far from men.”*

Elmer Smick: Shaft mining is evident, showing that the miners used ropes to haul out ore. Smelting was done with goatskin bellows. The often-vertical shafts varied in diameter up to five feet and followed the veins of ore.

Warren Wiersbe: Though man can dig deep into the earth and find great wealth, though he can go places where birds and beasts would not dare to go, though he can even find the hidden sources of the great rivers, man cannot find God’s wisdom by mere human efforts. It takes more than courage and native intelligence; it demands humility and spiritual perception.

Derek Kidner: He speaks of mining, tunneling, smelting and forging. Three techniques are known to have been used: a kind of opencast mining, especially on exposed river-beds, quarrying into exposed vertical rock surfaces, and deep-shaft mining. The reference to “*fire*” in **verse 5** possibly alludes to a process whereby a fire was lit in a tunnel. As the walls of the tunnel became hot, water was poured on it, causing the rock to crack. The fallen stones would then be taken to the surface. The science need not detain us, for Job has another point to get across. Man’s evident skill and ingenuity, even his persistence, are self-evident. Men were prepared to be killed in the search for precious metals and gem-stones, searching “*the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness*” (28:3). His skill outwitted even the “*falcon*” and the “*lion*” (28:7, 9). No other creature is as curious, courageous or clever as man.

B. (:5-6) Mining Efforts Yield Valuable Resources

*“The earth, from it comes food,
And underneath it is turned up as fire.
6 Its rocks are the source of sapphires,
And its dust contains gold.”*

Izak Cornelius: Seven metals are known from the ancient Near East: three precious metals—gold, silver, and electrum; and four base metals—copper, tin, lead, and iron. Bronze was an alloy made from copper and tin. Various sources are available to study ancient Near Eastern metallurgy—textual references, excavated objects, and metallurgical analysis.

C. (:7-8) Mining Efforts Surpass the Most Impressive Prowess of Birds and Beasts

*“The path no bird of prey knows,
Nor has the falcon’s eye caught sight of it.”*

*8 The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor has the fierce lion passed over it.”*

Francis Andersen: The falcon is celebrated for its **vision**, the lion for its **courage**. But neither is as observant or as intrepid as man, and neither bird nor beast has access to the remote places that men have penetrated in their lust for treasures. The function of these remarks in the middle of a poem about mining would seem to be another way of prizing mankind more than any other of God’s creatures, however admirable.

John Hartley: Mankind’s technical skill evidenced in mining reveals his superiority over all earthly creatures. Amazingly none of the animals with all their prowess can discover the path to such beautiful gems.

D. (:9-11) Mining Efforts Achieve Seismic Upheavals in Unearthing Hidden Treasures

*“He puts his hand on the flint;
He overturns the mountains at the base.
10 He hews out channels through the rocks;
And his eye sees anything precious.
11 He dams up the streams from flowing;
And what is hidden he brings out to the light.”*

John Hartley: Miners cut a series of channels (*ye’ōrīm*) in the mountainside. In the singular this Hebrew word refers to the Nile, and in the plural it stands for the tributaries of the Nile in the Delta. In this context it functions as a technical term for mining shafts. The miner enters the earth through these paths, and his eye sees precious treasures. He penetrates even to the sources of the rivers, the springs deep within the earth, in hopes of finding precious gems. Truly, human beings have vast knowledge and great technical skills.

(:12) REFRAIN – WISDOM IS ELUSIVE

*“But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?”*

Tremper Longman: This powerful description of human ability and successful efforts at finding hidden treasures under the surface of the earth contrasts strongly with our **inability to find wisdom**. Thus in v. 12 we encounter the first statement of the **refrain** that asks the rhetorical questions “*As for wisdom, where can it be found? The place of understanding, where is it?*” The answer is, no one knows. That is, **no human can discover wisdom unaided**.

John Hartley: Given the human drive to control the world, mankind is strongly allured by the power of wisdom. But its abode lies safely beyond the distant frontiers where human beings can make an entrance. No human being can bring wisdom into his own service.

II. (:13-19) WISDOM CANNOT BE PURCHASED BECAUSE IT IS PRICELESS AS THE HIGHEST VALUED TREASURE

David Thompson: vv. 13-19 -- **Why man does not find wisdom –**

- Because man does not know the value of wisdom. **28:13a**
- Because man does not know where to look for wisdom. **28:13b-14**
- Because man does not know he cannot buy wisdom. **28:15-19**

A. (:13-14) Wisdom Cannot Be Properly Valued or Found by Man

*“Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.
14 The deep says, 'It is not in me';
And the sea says, 'It is not with me.’”*

Tremper Longman: Besides the teaching that wealth cannot buy wisdom, this stanza also repeats the idea that wisdom cannot be found by human investigation. **Verse 13b** says that it is not resident in “*the land of the living*.” **Verse 14** adds that wisdom is not even in those places that are hostile to humans, the Deep and the Sea. I have capitalized these in my translation to indicate that the Deep and the Sea are here **personified**, which enhances the significance of these terms, since the Deep and especially the Sea were regarded as **forces of chaos and even evil** in the ancient Near East.

B. (:15-19) Wisdom is Priceless Compared to the Highest Valued Treasures

*“Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it,
Nor can silver be weighed as its price.
16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
In precious onyx, or sapphire.
17 Gold or glass cannot equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold.
18 Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned;
And the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls.
19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold.”*

Izak Cornelius: The Hebrew word used here (**vs. 17** -- its only occurrence in the Old Testament) probably refers to **glass**, which was known as an article of luxury. Glassware in the form of vessels was manufactured by the Phoenicians, and the Egyptians used it for inlays in jewelry.

(:20) REFRAIN – WISDOM IS ELUSIVE

*“Where then does wisdom come from?
And where is the place of understanding?”*

Poole: Man doth not see this wisdom but only so far as God is pleased to reveal it to him, and therefore he cannot declare it to others; man did not prepare, nor order, nor contrive it, and therefore no wonder if he cannot search it out.

III. (:21-27) ONLY GOD UNDERSTANDS AND DISPENSES WISDOM

Elmer Smick: The poem reaches its climax. God alone knows where the wisdom is (v.23), for he is omniscient. Humans must search for their treasure (vv.3–11), but God sees everything without searching (v.24). When he brought order out of the primeval chaos (vv.25–26), he used wisdom to do it. Wisdom is the summary of the genius God used to fashion the universe. In some sense it is objective to God (Pr 8:22), for he looked at it as though it were a blueprint of creation. He examined and approved it (v.27).

Warren Wiersbe: Go as high as the birds can fly, and you won't find wisdom there. Go as deep as Abaddon and death, and wisdom is not there. Only God knows where to find wisdom, for God sees everything. (He doesn't have to dig into the earth to see what's there!) God has the wisdom to adjust the pressure of the wind and measure the amount of water in the atmosphere. If these proportions were changed, what disturbances in nature might result! God knows how to control the rain and guide the storm as it moves across the earth. Flashes of lightning and pearls of thunder may seem arbitrary to us, but God controls even the lightning and thunder.

Derek Kidner: Wisdom is not found in the land of the living (28:21), or that of the dead (28:22). Having exhausted all human resources, and even those beyond the grave, Job has only one source to fall back upon – God! The source of wisdom lies in the one who is all-knowing (28:23), all-seeing (28:24) and all-powerful (28:25). It is the wisdom of the Creator (28:26-27). It is the word of his will, he revealed know-how of the one who knows how!

A. (:21-22) Wisdom Is Concealed from the Living and the Dead

*“Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living,
And concealed from the birds of the sky.”
Abaddon and Death say,
‘With our ears we have heard a report of it.’”*

Tremper Longman: The final stanza answers the question of the first three stanzas: **Where is wisdom located?** However, before doing so, the poet adds a final statement to the effect that wisdom is inaccessible not only to human resources but also to the rest of creation and even to personified Death. Indeed, v. 21a says it is hidden from the eyes of “*all the living*,” presumably humans who live on the surface of the earth. The next colon adds that even the birds of the heavens cannot find it. The birds would have a higher vantage point, and they also can cover more space quickly. Even so, they are not up to the task. **Verse 22** moves from the **earth** and the **heavens** to the **underworld**. Here the poet personifies Abaddon, the place of destruction, as well as Death itself. The

latter may be yet another mythological reference or allusion (see v. 14 above), since the Canaanites knew of a god Death (Mot), who like the Sea (Yam) was ranged against the god Baal. But these spiritual beings too have at best only heard a report about wisdom; they do not have any direct knowledge of it. Thus in vv. 21–22 the poet points out that the creatures of **earth, heaven, and the underworld** have no access to wisdom and cannot guide anyone to it.

John Hartley: Since wisdom is transcendent, it does not reside anywhere on earth or in the depths of the sea. No eye of any living creature⁶ has beheld it. Not even the birds, which soar high above the earth's surface, have caught a glimpse of it. The remote regions of Abaddon (*'abaddôn*) and Death, which were thought to be located in the depths of the sea, can only say, "We have heard a report of it." Although no one, living or dead, has ever seen wisdom, all know intuitively that it exists.

B. (:23-24) Wisdom Is Only Discoverable and Known by God

*"God understands its way;
And He knows its place.
24 For He looks to the ends of the earth,
And sees everything under the heavens."*

John MacArthur: **God understands its way, and He knows its place.**

These are perhaps the most important thoughts in the chapter for the debates. Job and his friends have probed God's wisdom three times and basically, have arrived nowhere near the truth. Finally, Job makes the point that the divine wisdom necessary to explain his suffering is **inaccessible** to humans. Only God knows it, because only He knows everything.

Francis Andersen: The place of wisdom is not simply in the mind of God. Wisdom is what God understands when he looks to the ends of the earth. Wisdom is observable in the universe because God embodied it in his creation when he '*saw*', '*reckoned*', '*organized*' and '*fathomed*'. Men can see this for themselves, but only when God himself shows it to them (**Rom. 1:19**). This is precisely what God will do for Job shortly, when he takes him on the grand tour of inspection.

Tremper Longman: **Verse 23** climactically reveals that, contrary to everyone and everything else, God does know the way to wisdom ("*its path*"). He knows where it is ("*its place*"). But before sharing this information, the poet explains why God alone would have this knowledge. After all, though the birds have a high vantage point from which to look at the world, they do not compare to God, who "*looks to the ends of the earth*." He sees everything under heaven (v. 24).

John Hartley: God, however, understands the way to wisdom and he knows its dwelling place. Since God's field of view encompasses the entire universe, including the remotest corners, he knows wisdom's abode. In knowing wisdom's place, God is its master. Wisdom, so to speak, discloses to him the deepest secrets of the universe. God, in contrast to man, sees everything under the whole heavens.

C. (:25-27) Wisdom Is Only Employed and Dispensed by God

*“When He imparted weight to the wind,
And meted out the waters by measure,
26 When He set a limit for the rain,
And a course for the thunderbolt,
27 Then He saw it and declared it;
He established it and also searched it out.”*

John Hartley: God’s employment of wisdom in structuring the world is amazingly evident in four mysterious forces: the wind, the waters, the rain, and the thunderstorm. Although the wind cannot be seen or held, God has assigned it weight (*mišqāl*). At times the wind blows lightly, refreshing the earth. Then at God’s command it gusts violently, inflicting great destruction. Furthermore, the vast, seemingly measureless waters of the oceans have been precisely measured by God (cf. **Isa. 40:12**). The sea, even in all its ferocity, is under God’s complete control. Similarly, the sending of the rain reveals God’s full understanding. God has made a decree or statute (*ḥōq*) for the rain. He determines both the season for the rain to water the earth and the amount of water that is to fall. The rain must obey his decree; e.g., it may not inundate the earth. More amazing is that God made a way for the violent thunderstorm (*ḥazîz qōlôṭ*). Though the lightning jumps about in a zigzag course, God has charted the course for its forks to travel, and he has prepared the way for the roll of thunder. These marvels of nature demonstrate that **God has structured the world order in wisdom**. . .

Wisdom played a vital role in creation. During his creative work God searched out wisdom’s marvelous ability. Creation was a great adventure for God, as he tested wisdom’s capacity. But his use of wisdom did not stop there. He continues to employ it fully in his governance of the universe. As a result, the world is filled with wonders and is governed in justice. Wisdom is God’s closest companion.

David Thompson: God’s eyes see everything on earth (**28:24**). He determines the limits of everything and He is the One who gives wisdom. **His wisdom is in creation.** According to **verses 25-27**, God’s wisdom is seen in four forces man will never control nor fully understand:

- 1) Wind—sometimes it refreshes, sometimes it destroys.
- 2) Waters—sometimes they are calm and sometimes they are devastating.
- 3) Rain—God determines when it rains, where it rains and how much it rains.
- 4) Thunder—Thunder roars and lightning zigzags through the sky and God controls its course.

Francis Andersen: Wisdom is found only in God, and man obtains it only by revelation.

(:28) CONCLUSION -- THE ESSENCE OF WISDOM REVEALED

*“And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
And to depart from evil is understanding.”*

Thomas Constable: The essence of wisdom is to *fear* (treat with reverential trust) *the Lord* (Master) *and to depart from evil* (v. 28). We know this only by supernatural revelation ("*to mankind He said*"). We can never plumb the depths of God's wisdom. However, we can experience wisdom partially as we adore and obey God—making Him, rather than self, the center of our lives, and allowing Him to regulate our lives. Job was obviously well acquainted with various kinds of mining operations. There were mines in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, Idumea, Aramea, Lebanon, and elsewhere as early as the patriarchal period.

John MacArthur: While the specific features of God's wisdom may not be revealed to us, the alpha and omega of wisdom is to revere God and avoid sin, leaving the unanswered questions to Him in trusting submission.

Elmer Smick: Having shown **God as the Source of wisdom**, the author now makes his **application to humans**. They must look to God for wisdom. Humans may share in it only through knowledge of the revealed mind of God. To acknowledge him as God and live within the sphere of his life-giving precepts is wisdom for human beings (**Dt 4:5–6; Ps 111:10; Pr 8:4–9; 9:10**).

Tremper Longman: The type of fear described here is not horror that makes one run away, and it is not merely the idea of respect. It is most like **awe**, a kind of knee-knocking fear that one feels in the presence of a vastly more powerful, even though benevolent, person. It is the kind of emotion that **removes pride and replaces it with humility**, which as Proverbs indicates (**1:7**) is a prerequisite to wisdom. Pride does not permit one to learn from another, whereas humility does and even goes further and compels obedience.

Wisdom starts with this fear. *Fear is the beginning of wisdom*, both in a foundational and in a temporal sense. One may know a lot of facts without fear of the Lord, but not to know the most basic reality of all—God—renders someone a fool: "*Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God'*" (**Ps. 14:1 NRSV**). Thus fear of God is a presupposition of wisdom. Further, wisdom in the Bible is not a body of knowledge but rather a **relationship**. The wise must have a dependent relationship with God that makes them listen to him. All true knowledge has reference to God.

John Hartley: It is important to note the significant grammatical difference in the treatment of the word wisdom in this verse. Up to this point "*wisdom*" has had the definite article, but in this verse it is without it. Since the same word is used, the wisdom available to mankind is **qualitatively** the same as that which God knows. The fact that this word is without the article indicates that it is the **practical** side of wisdom human beings may acquire.

Roy Zuck: Job's accusers had insisted that he was not fearing God or eschewing sin and that therefore he was not wise. In **Job 28** he argued the opposite: he was fearing God

and hating evil (as God Himself had already said of Job, **1:1, 8; 2:3**), but they were not! Therefore wisdom and understanding were his, not theirs.

Derek Kidner: Reverence of God means being in awe of his ways. God's tapestry is wonderful – yes, full of wonders! I may not understand it, but I have to accept it. It is the wise thing to do. I must bow in humility before his will: “*With humility comes wisdom*” (**Proverbs 11:2**). This is, in part at least, what Job means by “*shunning evil*”. It is to walk in obedience to what God has revealed: both in the natural revelation of the created world, and in God's Word written and infallibly inspired.

Warren Wiersbe: The important thing is that we focus on Christ, for He is our wisdom (**1 Cor. 1:24**), and in Him is hidden “*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (**Col. 2:3**). The better we know Christ and the more we become like him, the more we will walk in wisdom and understand the will of the Lord. We must allow the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our heart so we can see God in His Word and understand more of the riches we have in Christ (**Eph. 1:15-23**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the significance of this chapter on wisdom being located at this point in the book of Job?
- 2) How would you define wisdom and understanding?
- 3) How do men either fail to rightly value wisdom or seek to obtain it by the flesh?
- 4) What does fearing God and turning away from evil look like in your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tremper Longman: It is true that the chapter does start a whole new line of thinking, with little if any connection to Job's words in the previous section. Job's insight into the nature of God and a proper relationship with him begins with a reflection on the nature of mining (**vv. 1–12**). Mining ores and precious stones from the ground is a human achievement deserving of the deepest wonder and admiration. No other animal can extract these materials from the earth (**vv. 7–8**). Even so, **wisdom is beyond even human comprehension** (**v. 12**).

The second stanza of this reflection on wisdom (**vv. 13–20**) continues the theme of the **inaccessibility of wisdom** for humans. Wisdom does not have a price. All the wealth of the world cannot buy it.

The final stanza (vv. 21–28) finally answers the question of where wisdom may be found. After denying that even personified Death knows much or anything about it, the passage confidently asserts that God knows its path and its way (v. 23). After all, it is with him. But Job does not stop there. He affirms that though God is the source of all wisdom, humans can indeed have access to it. How? They can find wisdom by fearing the Lord and turning aside from evil.

John Hartley: Wisdom resides with God alone. It permeates all of his creative work. In mankind it finds expression in his amazing technical genius. But human ingenuity cannot find wisdom. Neither can all the wealth that man can wrestle from the earth purchase it. **Wisdom for mankind can only be discovered in a devout relationship with God.** Therefore, this hymn authenticates Job's turning away from his comforters to petition God directly. It is telling him that he will receive genuine insight into his suffering when God himself speaks to him. Thus this hymn prepares Job for Yahweh's appearing. More specifically, it indicates the approach that Yahweh will take in his discourses. He will address Job's lament by recounting the wise and marvelous way he has created the world. Thereby he will demonstrate that Job's suffering does not discount the truth that he rules the world wisely and justly. The only response Job can then make to Yahweh's discourse will be to fear Yahweh. In this manner the hymn links the opening characterization of Job as "*one who feared God and shunned evil*" (1:1, 8; 2:3) with his submissive response to Yahweh's word in the end (42:1–6).

G. Campbell Morgan: All this meditation flashes its light back upon the controversy. It is practically an admission that both he and his friends are at a loss in the presence of the problem of his suffering. Yet it is an affirmation of that faith which over and over again proclaiming its consciousness of mystery, yet held fast to God. For them and for him the only wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and to depart from evil.

There is in this position virtually a new declaration of his innocence, and a charge against them. In their attempt to interpret the dealing of God there had been departure from His fear.

David Atkinson: True wisdom thus remains the **gift of God** – and it is a **gift of grace**. All other skills – even the marvels of the mine, to say nothing of the orthodoxy of Bildad, the theology we shall find in Elihu, or even the innocent, upright character of Job himself – these skills are as nothing without the fear of the Lord. Wisdom is a way of living before God. **Gerhardt von Rad** writes: 'The thesis that all human knowledge comes back to the question about commitment to God is a statement of penetrating perspicacity... One becomes competent and expert as far as the orders in life are concerned only if one begins from knowledge about God.'

So what does this say to Job? It reminds him – and especially reminds us, the readers, as we wrestle with Job in his pain, and struggle to make sense of his appalling situation – that there is more to life than we can understand with our senses. There is more to wisdom than even the greatest of human skills. There is a different way of looking at everything – from the **perspective of God** the Creator. He sees '*everything under the*

heavens', whereas we see only a part. There is more to Job's predicament than Job himself will ever know (though we were let in to part of the divine secret in **chapters 1 and 2**). What is needed is a new beginning to our knowledge – to start not from our experience of misery like Job, nor from our own mystical experience like Eliphaz, not from our understanding of theological tradition like Bildad, nor from our own inflated common sense like Zophar.

True wisdom is **accessible to God alone** – which means that it can come from him alone. The wisdom which will contain an answer to Job can come only from God.

Chapter 28 thus stands in the book of Job as a warning that any further speculations along the lines of the three friends will be fruitless. The way out of the impasse will not be from below, upwards, but from above, downwards. It will not come as part of the belief system of mankind, but only as a gift of God. The starting-point for true knowledge of God is God himself in his own self-disclosure. We need to meet the Lord as he comes to us in grace. We need to begin with the fear of the Lord, in communion with him as he chooses to make himself known.

Peter Wallace: Wisdom is best defined as **knowing how to live in God's world**.

Wisdom is at the **intersection of knowledge and skill**. The wise man knows what is right. And what is more, the wise man knows how to do what is right. And still more, the wise man actually does what is right!

There are scholars who know an immense amount of information – but immense knowledge is not wisdom. There are craftsmen who are technically precise – but technical precision does not require wisdom.

Job's three friends are impeccably orthodox in their theology; they are skilled in argumentation and debate; but they are not wise, because they do not know how to apply their knowledge and skill to Job's situation.

So wisdom is both knowing how to live in God's world, and the practical implementation of that knowledge. In other words, wisdom is the most important thing you can have. If you have wisdom, you have everything. If you lack wisdom, you have nothing.

But where do you find wisdom?

Most scholars have thought that **verses 1-11** are talking about ancient **mining operations** but some have suggested that the overall context of **verses 1-11** is more of a **travel narrative** than a mining operation. After all, there wasn't much mining going on in either Israel or Edom. So the "*farthest limit*" in **verse 3** may be a horizontal reference as Job speaks of man's explorations to the ends of the earth. . .

Now Job speaks of those who embark on a quest for the most precious and desirable of things. Whether digging down or exploring out – the point is that man is engaged in a **quest**. Whether Shalmaneser seeking for the sources of the Tigris, or Columbus seeking

for a western route to the Indies, man has always sought to “go where no man has gone before”!

In the ancient world, the birds of prey and the beasts inhabited the waste lands that surrounded the civilized lands. Domestic animals – flocks and herds – populated the inhabited lands. Wild beasts, serpents and lions, and birds of prey, inhabit the “wilderness” – the uninhabited lands around. **But what lies beyond the uninhabited lands?** There are many ancient texts that talk about lands “beyond” – and many ancient kings claimed to have explored lands where no bird had flown – where no beast had roamed. . .

Now he speaks of a **quest to the ends of the earth** – a quest in search of hidden treasure beyond the reach of ordinary men. Job is not just talking about a place where no bird or beast has gone before. Job speaks of a place where no man has gone before. .

Wisdom is present in creation. But you cannot find it there. So the quest for the most valuable thing in the world is doomed to failure from the beginning – because no matter where you go, and no matter how hard you look, you will never find it. . .

To the one who believes in Jesus, God graciously gives wisdom – he gives you the knowledge of what to do – the skill to know how to do it – and the strength actually to do it! Because Christ Jesus has become for us “*wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” (1 Cor 1:30)

TEXT: Job 29:1-25

TITLE: FOCUS ON THE PAST – LONGING FOR THE GOOD OLD TIMES

BIG IDEA:

PAST BLESSINGS INSPIRE WISTFUL REFLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines: This speech has a clear **tripartite structure**, corresponding to the three chapters, **29–31**. The three movements are differentiated by their **temporal focus**: **chap. 29** looks entirely to the past (“*Oh, that I were in the months of old*”), **chap. 30** looks to the present as a contrast to that past, with the repetition of its key word “*and now*” (vv 1, 9, 16), while **chap. 31**, in returning to the past, has the future more in mind, both as the realm where Job’s imprecations could come into being and as the sphere of the longed-for response from God.

Elmer Smick: Like a lawyer summing up his case, Job begins his monologue with an emotional recall of his former happiness, wealth, and honor (**ch. 29**) and proceeds to lament, not the loss of wealth, but the loss of his dignity and God’s friendship (**ch. 30**). He completes this trilogy with a final protestation of innocence (**ch. 31**). This chapter is sometimes called a negative confession. It is really an oath of innocence that effectively concludes with Job’s signature in **31:35**. There is no more Job can say; his case rests in God’s hands. Job has to be shown to be a liar and suffer the punishment he calls upon himself or be vindicated. **Chapter 29** is a classic example of Semitic rhetoric with one of the elements of good style being a **symmetrical structure**.

In this writer’s opinion, the order of the verses in the Hebrew text presents the author’s original symmetrical intention. The pattern is as follows:

Blessing	(vv.2–6)
Honor	(vv.7–10/11)
Job’s benevolence	(vv.11/12–17)
Blessing	(vv.18–20)
Honor	(vv.21–25)

Chapter 29 deals with both **active** and **passive** aspects of Job’s former life. He was blessed by God and honored by people. But he was also **socially active**, a **benefactor** and **leader**. His benevolence was an important part of the high position he held in his society, where social righteousness was expected of every ruling elder. The Ugaritic literature and Hammurabi’s Code both stress the responsibility of rulers to protect the poor and champion the cause of widows and orphans. So a description of Job’s benevolence is in the **climactic position** in this oration, with the key line (v.14) in the exact middle of the poem. This verse sums up his benevolence in a striking metaphor about his being clothed with righteousness. Such benevolence establishes his right to

the honor and blessing that the surrounding verses describe. This chapter, then, is setting the stage for **chapter 30**.

John Hartley: This **avowal of innocence** consists of three distinct parts: Job's remembrance of his former abundant life (**ch. 29**), a lament (**ch. 30**), and an oath of innocence (**ch. 31**). The author has composed a wonderful piece by stretching the structure of a psalm of lament. At the beginning he has placed Job's reminiscence of his past glory (**ch. 29**). And at the conclusion he has elaborately expanded an oath of innocence, an element that appears in some psalms of lament (e.g., **Ps. 7:4–6 [Eng. 3–5]; 17:3, 5**). The entire speech may be labeled an avowal of innocence. The oath of innocence is the focal point of the avowal, for by it Job demands from God a legal judgment on his character. The remembrance portrays by contrast the depth of Job's affliction as expressed in the lament. These two elements also reveal Job's motivation for uttering the oath. And the lament seeks to move God to respond compassionately to Job's oath. In **Westermann**'s words, Job is simultaneously "a supplicant and an initiator of a legal proceeding."

Job begins his avowal of innocence with a detailed description of his former stature in the community. Then he had intimate fellowship with God. The community recognized God's favor in his life and showed him their highest respect. But Job did not rest in his glory; he diligently helped the poor and unfortunate. Confident that he pleased God, he looked for a long, prosperous life. This remembrance serves to portray the depth of his shame as he will express it in his lament (**ch. 30**).

The five sections of this chapter are

- God's rich blessing (**vv. 1–6**);
- the respect Job commanded (**vv. 7–10**);
- Job's striving for justice (**vv. 11–19**);
- Job's hope for a long, blessed life (**vv. 19–20**);
- and the most respected elder (**vv. 21–25**).

Three **nodal verses** in the speech, for each of its three movements, may be detected. In the first movement, the opening line, "*Oh, that I were in the months of old!*" (**v 2**), is evidently the key to all that follows. In the second, there is not so obviously one nodal verse, but the last verse (**v 31**) enshrines the theme of the movement perfectly, with its contrast between the former days and the present: "*My harp has been given over to mourning, and my flute to the voice of those who wail.*" In the third movement, there can be little doubt that the key verse is that which brings together the whole of the chapter and calls for future action: "*Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!*" (**v 35**).

Tremper Longman: This chapter contains Job's **wistful reflections** on his previous life, when his **prosperity** and **fame** coincided with his righteous behavior. He begins by remembering the days when God blessed him. He speaks in general terms in **vv. 2–7**. When God was his friend, his life was good and he was considered important. He was indeed so important and powerful that young people got out of his way and the aged

and noble were quiet in order to let him speak (vv. 8–10). People respected him not simply because he was powerful but also because he took care of the vulnerable (poor, orphans, widows, the blind and lame, the needy and stranger; vv. 11–17).

For these reasons, he thought that he would be honored for life and die in peace. He thought that he would thrive (vv. 18–25) until the end.

(:1) PROLOGUE – JOB’S SECOND MONOLOGUE

“And Job again took up his discourse and said,”

John Hartley: The introductory formula sets off these three chapters from the previous two chapters (chs. 27–28), which in their present position appear to be a part of Job’s last speech in the dialogue. The introductory formula is the same as that for ch. 27. . . Here the introductory formula indicates that Job continues to speak, but that he is taking a different direction. It thus marks off Job’s **avowal of innocence** from the dialogue.

I. (:2-6) PAST BLESSINGS

Derek Kidner: Four particular blessings

1. God’s care for them (:2-3)
2. God’s friendship (:4)
3. God’s provision (:5)
4. God’s presence (:5)

A. (:2) God’s Providential Care

*“Oh that I were as in months gone by,
As in the days when God watched over me;”*

John Hartley: Job begins his avowal of innocence by remembering his former glory. He characterizes those days as a time when God nourished and protected his life. The phrase God watched [*šāmar*] over me describes God’s special care for and protection of his own servant (cf. Num. 6:24–26; Ps. 91:11; 121:7–8). In a grateful manner Job acknowledges that God, not his own wisdom and shrewdness, had been the source of his wealth. Job never lets his pride lead him to make the claim that he had been the genius behind his success. His conviction about God’s blessing keeps his lament focused on the real cause of his pain, a ruptured relationship with God. Since he never abandons his gratitude for God’s past favor, his lament flows from real hurt.

David Atkinson: In 29:1, we again get the introductory formula ‘*Job continued his discourse*’. Job is yearning for that sense of the immediacy of God’s presence that he had known before.

In the words of **William Cowper**:

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?...*

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.*

Job recalls those earlier days. If only it were like that again! ‘How I long for the months gone by, for the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head and by his light I walked through darkness!’ (29:2-3). **Verses 2 to 11** are a longing for those earlier days, full of wistfulness and sadness.

David Clines: The air of **nostalgia** in **chap. 29** is persuasively introduced by the opening wish, “*Oh, that I were in the months of old*” (v 2), and sustained throughout the chapter, climaxing in Job’s report of his former thought, “*I shall die among my nestlings . . .*” (vv 18–20). Everything in this first movement is sweetness and light, his footsteps bathed in curds (v 6), and his young people about him—with the lone exception of the passing reference to breaking the jawbone of the unrighteous (v 17). . .

What is this “*keeping*” by God? What does it consist of, what are its effects? On the most basic level, it is a keeping alive, so that if Job is alive it is evidence of God’s “keeping” him. But “keeping” generally means more than that, and implies **life with good fortune**. In the days when God watched over him, Job was prosperous; and his prosperity is what he means here by God’s keeping him. It is the same as in 1:10, where God’s “*putting a hedge*” about him is parallel to, and essentially means the same as, God’s “*blessing*” him so that his possessions increase. No doubt we should recognize that Job is expressing a gratitude to God when he attributes his wealth to God’s blessing (as **Hartley**); but is he now expressing gratitude for God’s taking his wealth away? In 1:21 he blessed the God who had given and who had taken away; but that does not seem to be his attitude now. Rather, **he feels he has been abused by God**.

Warren Wiersbe: There is a ministry in memory if we use it properly. Moses admonished Israel to remember the way God had led them and cared for them (**Deut. 8:2**). In fact, the word “*remember*” is found fourteen times in Deuteronomy and word “*forget*” nine times. In days of disappointment, it’s good to “*remember the years of the right hand of the Most High*” (**Ps. 77:10-11**; see **42:6**). But the past must be a **rudder** to guide us and not an **anchor** to hold us back. If we try to duplicate today what we experienced yesterday, we may find ourselves in a rut that robs us of maturity.

B. (:3) God’s Guiding Illumination

*“When His lamp shone over my head,
And by His light I walked through darkness;”*

John Hartley: Light is a symbol of blessing and success (**Ps. 36:10 [Eng. 9]; 18:29 [Eng. 28]**). Healing and joy attend its shining. When Job faced darkness or difficult circumstances God’s light gave him direction and the courage to pursue the right course. As God showed Job the way, Job obeyed by walking in it.

Spurgeon: It is a great thing for a man to be **near to God**; it is a very choice privilege to be admitted into the inner circle of communion, and to become God's familiar friend. Great as the privilege is, so great is the loss of it. No darkness is so dark as that which falls on eyes accustomed to the light.

The ways that Job sensed this great loss from God.

- First, he complains that he had lost the consciousness of **divine preservation** (*as in the days when God watched over me*).
- Job had also lost **divine consolation**, for he looks back with lamentation to the time when God's candle shone upon his head (*when His lamp shone upon my head*).
- Moreover, Job deplored the loss of **divine illumination**. 'By his light,' he says, 'I walked through darkness,' that is to say, perplexity ceased to be perplexity (*by His light I walked through darkness*).
- Moreover, Job had lost **divine communion**: so it seems, for he mourned the days of his youth, when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle (*when the friendly counsel of God was over my tent*).

C. (:4-5) God's Intimate Friendship

*"As I was in the prime of my days,
When the friendship of God was over my tent;
When the Almighty was yet with me,
And my children were around me;"*

John Hartley: Prior to his misfortune Job believed that he had reached the prime of life (lit. "*his own harvest*," *ḥōrep*), the time in his life when he would fully enjoy the abundance of his labor. An intimate in his tent, God was present with Job, giving him counsel and protection. God fully accepted his servant, for his presence is the highest blessing he bestows on a person. Job was also filled with happiness at the sound of his children playing about his dwelling. The children themselves were a concrete sign of God's blessing (cf. **Ps. 128:3**).

Derek Kidner: Nothing is more reassuring than to have God's presence with us. It is the very essence of God's covenant with us that he repeats, again and again, "*I will be with you*" (cf. **Genesis 39:2; Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5, 9; Isaiah 43:2, 5; Matthew 1:23; 28:20**). At present, Job has lost the assurance of God's presence. His friends are mocking him, just as the psalmists' enemies did when they said, "*Where is your God now?*" (**Psalms 42:3, 9, 10; 43:1-2**). But then, in those wonderful days before the trial, God was with him, and he knew it!

D. (:6) God's Abundant Provision

*"When my steps were bathed in butter,
And the rock poured out for me streams of oil!"*

Francis Andersen: The traditional tokens of God's approval were a numerous family, prolific herds and productive fields. These Job enjoyed (**5b, 6**). The *rock* is either the

olive press or the hillside with terraced groves of trees.

John Hartley: Job's household was filled with abundance. An abundance of curds and oil symbolize a rich, affluent life. Job's flocks produced such an abundance of curds, a staple food, that figuratively speaking he had the luxury of washing his feet in thick cream. His olive trees produced such a great yield that the rock poured out streams of oil for Job. This imagery refers either to the olive trees growing on the rocky hillside or to the olive presses, made out of stone and set up in the orchards, flowing with oil. Olive oil was a vital product for the ancients. They used it for cooking, for fuel in their lamps, and as an ointment for the body.

David Clines: It is especially interesting that in this picture of his former happy domestic existence Job simply puts side by side various memories of his past, without categorizing or prioritizing them. Even if he thinks it, he does not want to say that any one of them is the key or the source of the happiness; he is not in the business of accounting. But commentators are. They insist on saying things like "Naturally the first element in Job's happiness . . . was the presence of his children. . . . The second, though a less, element of his happiness was his overflowing abundance" (**Davidson**). "[T]he presence of his children . . . constitute[s] God's blessing par excellence" (**Gordis**). "[God's] presence is the highest blessing he bestows on a person" (**Hartley**). "The companionship of God was his highest good, then the companionship of his children" (**Peake**). "The sum of his happiness had been his sure untroubled sense of the divine presence. . . . The second element of his happiness had been his domestic gladness" (**Strahan**). Job, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by a **mixture of disparate memories**, which are related in some way he does not wish to explore. **Each has its charm and each its bitterness.**

II. (:7-10) PAST RESPECT

Francis Andersen: Wealthy men are not often loved. They are more likely to be feared, envied or hated. In the Bible there are numerous passages in which the rich are equated with the wicked. It is supposed that a person gets rich only by dishonesty, at someone else's loss, and keeps his gains because he is selfish. Not so Job. He enjoyed the esteem of the whole town. The Greeks were not the only ancient people who saw the good life in terms of full participation in the affairs of the city. In Israel the gate of the city (7) was the community centre where public business was done. Here Job was shown the highest respect.

A. (:7) Daily Routine Involved Prominent Status

*"When I went out to the gate of the city,
When I took my seat in the square;"*

Tremper Longman: He also served in an important and well-honored societal capacity, since 29:7 tells us he sat in the gate of the city, the place where the leaders of the city (elders) sat and made important decisions. He was highly honored then, but no longer.

B. (:8-10) Deferential Response Involved Honor and Respect

Tremper Longman: Job continues his painful reminiscence of better times by cataloguing how people used to react to him. Both young and old showed him great respect. The young got out of his way, and those who were his age (that is, his equals) stood to honor him. The latter reminds us of today's practice of standing in a courtroom when the judge enters the room. Job was someone who could make an impact on their lives, so they showed him proper deference. **Verses 9–10** continue this theme by speaking of how even the upper classes of society (*princes, śārîm; nobles, neġîdîm*) were awed by his presence. They demonstrated their respect by growing silent. This likely indicates the honor in which they would have held Job's speech. Why should they speak when a man of such obvious wisdom and piety has the floor?

1. (:8) Response of All Ages – Young and Old

*“The young men saw me and hid themselves,
And the old men arose and stood.”*

2. (:9-10) Response of the Elite -- Princes and Key Officials

*“The princes stopped talking,
And put their hands on their mouths;
The voice of the nobles was hushed,
And their tongue stuck to their palate.”*

Cf. old E. F. Hutton commercials

John Hartley: *Nobles (neġîdîm)*, those who had positions of authority in the government or in the army, also hushed their speaking. Their esteem for Job is caught by the phrase *their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths*. Job was accorded the highest honor as he took his seat in the town square.

Elmer Smick: Correct protocol demanded silence till the most honored person had spoken. The language excels in its descriptive power: Hushed, with their tongues sticking to the roofs of their mouths, all used to wait in silence for Job to speak (**v.10**). **Verse 11** implies that he had spoken and registers the effect.

III. (:11-17) PURSUIT OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE VULNERABLE

Francis Andersen: For Job, right conduct is almost entirely social; his private duty to himself as a man is not discussed, his duty to God in the cult is touched on only in the matter of idolatry (**31:26f.**), an important but negative matter. In Job's conscience, sins are not just wrong things people do, disobeying known laws of God or society; to **omit** to do good to any fellow human being, of whatever rank or class, would be a grievous offence to God.

David Clines: It should not go without notice that Job's sense of responsibility to the needy has the effect of making him into a near royal figure. . . In the Psalms, the one who has the duty of judging the poor and delivering the needy, the one who has blessings showered on him for his deeds of philanthropy, is the **king** (cf. **Ps 72:1–4, 12–14, 15–17**). Job's benevolence is sincere enough, but he benefits from it in self-esteem and in the regard of others.

A. (:11-14) Protecting the Vulnerable

1. (:11-12) Receiving Accolades for Protecting the Vulnerable

*“For when the ear heard, it called me blessed;
And when the eye saw, it gave witness of me,
Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
And the orphan who had no helper.”*

Tremper Longman: First, Job was a **protector of the vulnerable**. The poor, the orphan, and the widow were those who easily fell prey in ancient society. The orphan lacked parents, and the widow lacked a husband who could care for the family. The poor lacked resources. Job, however, stepped forward with his wealth to help these unfortunates. Job earlier identified those who did not help the socially vulnerable as wicked (**24:3–4, 21**). Here he also refutes Eliphaz's point that he oppressed the widow and the orphan (**22:9**).

2. (:13) Reviving Blessing and Joy to the Vulnerable

*“The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.”*

3. (:14) Rendering Decisions in Justice and Righteousness

*“I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
My justice was like a robe and a turban.”*

Elmer Smick: Verse 14 stands in the center of the stanza and the poem. It sums up in a metaphor what the surrounding verses present in action, thus describing his character as righteous. The entire stanza is the climax because it presents Job's major point in the trilogy as well as the reason he was so honored and blessed.

John Hartley: Job clothed himself with righteousness, and in turn righteous activity clothed him. The justice he practiced enveloped him like a mantle and a turban. The robe or mantle was a garment worn on dress occasions, and the turban symbolized one's status, e.g., that of a king (**Isa. 62:3**) or a high priest (**Zech. 3:5**). While Job presided as elder his clothes witnessed to his complete commitment to justice. Indeed, Job implanted these qualities deep within himself so that they controlled his words and decisions.

David Clines: Job “*clothed*” himself with righteousness (cf. **Isa 59:17; 61:10; Ps 132:9**); he adorned himself with this quality, and it brought honor to him, as a costly

garment would. Evildoers are sometimes said to be clothed with shame (8:22; Ps 132:18); that is the opposite of the honor that accrues from right behavior. In 40:10 Job is challenged by God to clothe himself with glory and splendor if he is to be any match for the Almighty; it is implied that God himself is decked in the most glorious clothes imaginable. Here Job is thinking not so much of being surrounded by righteousness as one's body is surrounded by its clothes, but more as being noticed by others for the quality of his benevolence, as one is noticed for the quality of one's clothing. His right dealing with others serves like a mantle and a turban, clothing him entirely, and projecting the persona he desires.

B. (:15-17) Delivering the Vulnerable

Tremper Longman: In vv. 15–17 Job returns to listing the **benefits** he brought to those in need. He gave sight to the blind, indicating that he would guide them to their destination. Perhaps he was “*feet to the lame*” by carrying them or having them carried by his servants. The needy did not have a father who would protect and provide for them, but Job served that function. Strangers could be easily neglected in ancient society, but not by Job, who made sure that they were treated justly. As for the wicked who would take advantage of such people, Job attacked them. He broke their jaw, not allowing them to masticate these people as prey.

1. (:15) Delivering the Severely Handicapped

*“I was eyes to the blind,
And feet to the lame.”*

2. (:16a) Dispensing Loving Care to the Needy

“I was a father to the needy,”

3. (:16b) Diligently Investigating Tough Cases to Deliver the Right Verdict

“And I investigated the case which I did not know.”

Peter Wallace: I want you to see a couple things here.

- First, **Job delivered the poor who cried for help.** The legal system has been charged with cronyism ever since its origins. The courts have been dominated by the rich and powerful since the beginning – after all, they are trying to protect their wealth and status! The city gate (or the county court house) can be an intimidating place for the poor But Job had a reputation for defending the weak and powerless – at least, those “*who cried for help*”!
- Second, Job “**searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.**” The idea here is that he carefully investigated a complaint – he was thorough in his work as a judge. The reason why this is important is because if you just side with the weak against the strong, you may wind up doing injustice; because sometimes the weak is in the wrong! Job searched out the cause of him whom I did not

know, so that he could break the fangs of the unrighteous. If you are going to take on the rich and powerful, then you need to have a strong argument!

4. (:17a) Destroying the Power of the Oppressors

“And I broke the jaws of the wicked,”

5. (:17b) Delivering Vulnerable Prey

“And snatched the prey from his teeth.”

John Hartley: Job went a step further. He not only helped the oppressed; he also sought to break the power of the oppressors. He wanted both to deprive these scoundrels of their spoil and to put them out of commission. The cruel harshness with which these charlatans afflicted the unfortunate is captured by the word *fangs*. They acted like fierce animals, ravaging their weak prey. Job, however, championed the cause of the abused, *broke the fangs of the wicked*, and *snatched the prey from his teeth*.

IV. (:18-20) EXPECTATION OF A LONG AND VIGOROUS LIFE – 3 ANALOGIES

A. (:18) Sand Analogy

*“Then I thought, ‘I shall die in my nest,
And I shall multiply my days as the sand.’”*

Tremper Longman: In **v. 18b** he confesses that he expected that he would live till his days were like sand. The number of grains in even a small quantity of sand is almost beyond counting. So if Job’s days are like the sand, then he is extremely old. **Verse 19** shifts to a tree analogy. Job is like a tree whose roots went toward (or probably in) the water and whose branches were soaked in dew. A tree is an image of fertility and life but only insofar as it is nourished by plentiful water, as here.

B. (:19) Tree Analogy

*“My root is spread out to the waters,
And dew lies all night on my branch.”*

John Hartley: Because of God’s blessing Job had expected to experience abundant blessings, both material and spiritual. He pictures himself as a stalwart tree, a fitting image for the righteous. He believed that his roots were spreading out to a perennial source of water. And in the dry season the nightly dew would refresh his branches. He believed confidently that he could weather any adversity.

C. (:20) Warrior and Hunter Analogy

*“My glory is ever new with me,
And my bow is renewed in my hand.”*

John Hartley: Job believed that he would have a vigorous life in all aspects. The paralleling of *liver* and *bow* means that he would be strong emotionally and physically.

The liver is an organ associated with a person's most intimate feelings. A fresh liver means that a sense of well-being permeated his inner being. From within himself he had the resilience to lead the community in the way of righteousness. The bow signifies manly vigor (**Gen. 49:24**); thus to have one's bow broken symbolizes that one becomes impotent. Job believed that his bow would be ever new, always pliable so that he could continually rely on it to shoot an arrow with force and accuracy. That is, Job looked forward to a vigorous, healthy life and to the growth of his honor and authority in Uz.

V. (:21-25) RESPECTED LEADERSHIP ROLE

John Hartley: The community *listened expectantly to Job's counsel*. When he spoke, others kept silent out of deep respect. They anticipated excitedly that Job's words would point the direction that the community would take. His rhetoric was so insightful that no one dared to oppose him. The manner of his speaking *fell gently* on the people. Through wise, gentle counsel he inspired the community to carry out the right course of action. His words were awaited like the coming of the winter *rains* to water the dry earth. The community drank wisdom from them just as the ground gladly absorbs *the spring rain*, i.e., the latter rains which bring the maturing crops to a full harvest.

Warren Wiersbe: His final **source of joy** was the privilege of speaking words of encouragement and help (**vv. 21-25**). He was indeed a Barnabas, "*a son of encouragement*" (**Acts 4:36**; NKJV), whose words were respected and appreciated. When he spoke, it was as gentle and refreshing as the rain. When he gave people hope, Job's approval was like the dawning of a new day! He was a leader who helped the perplexed make wise decisions and gave the mourners fresh comfort and hope.

Roy Zuck: Besides being blessed (**vv. 2-6**); helping others (**vv. 7-17**), and expecting his health and vigor to continue (**vv. 18-20**), Job's counsel was welcomed – contrary to the attitude of his three uninvited guests! People had eagerly welcomed his opinions, like the soil drinking in the spring rain. In his counseling he even encouraged others by his smile.

A. (21-23) Leadership Role in Providing Helpful Counsel

*"To me they listened and waited,
And kept silent for my counsel.
After my words they did not speak again,
And my speech dropped on them.
And they waited for me as for the rain,
And opened their mouth as for the spring rain."*

B. (:24) Leadership Role in Providing Emotional Encouragement

*"I smiled on them when they did not believe,
And the light of my face they did not cast down."*

John Hartley: At the appropriate moment Job *smiled* on the people. His expression of warmth and blessing so delighted them that they *scarcely believed it*. Whoever lets his countenance shine on others expresses his kindness toward them (cf. **Ps. 4:7 [Eng. 61]**). The people never let Job's cherished gesture pass unnoticed (so **Dhorme**); his smile motivated them to moral courage. Job was an inspirational leader and "a beneficent source of life" (**Habel**, OTL).

David Clines: The meaning of this verse is much disputed. The key issues are: Did Job **smile** (whether in approval or encouragement) or **laugh** at his fellow citizens? The verb could mean either. Did they "not believe" he smiled at them because he was usually so strict and solemn, or was it that he smiled on them because they were "inconfident"? And what does "*the light of my face they did not drop*" mean? It is hard to say, but the best interpretation seems to be that when he smiled on them in approval they could hardly believe their good fortune, since they never expected any opinion of theirs to merit his acceptance. . . That they did not disregard the importance of acquiring Job's favor is an understatement of course; to gain it was their supreme goal—that is what Job means to say.

Others interpret quite differently, seeing here a reference to Job's encouragement of the downhearted, and to the impossibility of anyone causing his happiness to falter (taking "*cast down the light of my face*" to mean "*make me sad*"). Thus, for example, **Driver:** "Job's clear-sighted counsel encouraged them, if they were despondent: on the other hand . . . their despondency never clouded his cheerfulness" (similarly **Rowley**); and **Delitzsch** "[He] did not allow anything to dispossess him of his easy and contented disposition."

C. (:25) Summary of Respected Leadership Role

*"I chose a way for them and sat as chief,
And dwelt as a king among the troops,
As one who comforted the mourners."*

Francis Andersen: The last verse is the most difficult of all. This is a pity, for it seems to be a **summary**. The last colon, which some (e.g. NEB) delete as a homeless stray, might be echoing **verse 24** with a reference to the comforting of mourners. The parallelism within **verse 25a**, however, permits a tetracolon to be worked out. Job is invested with the highest titles.

*I was chosen as their governor,
And I used to sit as their chief,
And I dwelt like a king in his regiment
like one who comforts mourners.*

Such was the former greatness of Job.

John Hartley: Job's judicious counsel prompted the people to appoint him as their *chief*. This verse encompasses every aspect of his role in the community, from leading the counsel in peaceful times to guiding the people through a crisis and to caring for the unfortunate. As though he were a king over his troops, he inspired the community to

work with moral resolve and discipline for the common good. This picture suggests that Job addressed the assembly particularly on the occasion of their mourning some catastrophe, like drought, famine, or plague. Through his wise counsel he led the community to take steps to overcome the difficulty.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was the impact of Job's wistful reflections on past blessings?
- 2) Is our character and conduct worthy of honor and respect from our community?
- 3) What can we do in a practical sense to pursue justice and righteousness for the vulnerable in our communities?
- 4) How helpful and encouraging is our counsel to others (as opposed to the worthless and harmful counsel of Job's friends)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tremper Longman: Job is thinking back on a time when things were good in his life. He also believed that these good times would never end. **Verse 18** indicates this, "*I will die in my nest, and I will multiply my days like sand.*" This attitude too is widely held. When life is good, we see no end in sight.

Such a view is quite dangerous, though, and easily belied by Scripture and by experience. The danger arises in our **expectations**. If we feel that we deserve God's blessing because of our faith and obedience, then when that blessing is disturbed by hardship, we are left confused and angry. Job is a good example of this, as is Qohelet. He thought he deserved a good life, but when he observed the righteous dying young and the wicked living long, it led him to declare life "*meaningless*" (**Eccles. 7:15–18**).

But the Bible, in both OT and NT, never promises that God's people will enjoy undisturbed blessings in this life. Even the book of Proverbs recognizes that the righteous wise may have to choose between godliness and earthly enjoyment. . .

Life is full of difficulties. We should not forget this truth during periods of blessing. Otherwise, like Job we will set ourselves up for a horrible fall.

David Thompson: We have an old saying, "don't live in the past," but the truth is sometimes that is the best way to cope with the present. That is exactly what Job does in

Job 29. For just a few moments Job let his mind leave the harsh realities of his hurt and think back to the many blessings in life he had experienced.

Job had been a man who loved God and lived life in a way that feared God and in a way that was blessed by God. In Job's past was the story of a man who truly did have the favor of God. Job knew that and so did everyone else who knew him. People know and sense who God has His hand on. They knew that Job once had all the blessings of God. But everything had changed. The bottom had fallen out and Satan had attacked Job and taken just about everything away from Job, but he could not take away his memories of the way life used to be. Life, at one time, had been good for Job and in this chapter Job reflects on that reality. This is a very important lesson for us to learn:

WHEN A FAITHFUL BELIEVER IS EXPERIENCING ONE NEGATIVE THING AFTER ANOTHER IN THE PRESENT, IT IS COMFORTING TO REFLECT ON THE MANY BLESSINGS OF GOD IN THE PAST.

When you are faithful to God and you are experiencing terrible, unexplained negatives, there is nothing wrong with reflecting on how God has blessed you and used you in the past. There is real comfort in remembering the way things were prior to the negatives.

There are sixteen past memories:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| #1 – In the past, he had the care and protection of God. | 29:2 |
| #2 – In the past, he had the blessings of God. | 29:3a |
| #3 – In the past, he had the direction of God. | 29:3b |
| #4 – In the past, he had the friendship of God. | 29:4 |
| #5 – In the past, he had the presence of God. | 29:5a |
| #6 – In the past, he had his children around him. | 29:5b |
| #7 – In the past, he had a smooth life. | 29:6a |
| #8 – In the past, he had a prosperous life. | 29:6b |
| #9 – In the past, he had a revered reputation. | 29:7-10 |
| #10 – In the past, everyone respected him. | 29:11-17 |
| #11 – In the past, he had positive future hope. | 29:18 |
| #12 – In the past, he had a refreshing life. | 29:19-20 |
| #13 – In the past, people listened to him. | 29:21-22 |
| #14 – In the past, people wanted to hear from him. | 29:23 |
| #15 – In the past, he was kind and gracious to unbelievers. | 29:24 |
| #16 – In the past, he made leadership decisions. | 29:25 |

Andrew Davis: O FOR THE DAYS GONE BY!

- The best part of his former life was that God watched over him and loved him and protected him
- God's light shone in his life... representing the way God guided him with wisdom and knowledge
- Job speaks of when he was in his PRIME... literally "my harvest days"... when

blessing upon blessing rolled into the barns of my life

- God's intimate friendship was the greatest blessing—a sense of the closeness of God's secret counsel—as though God whispered wisdom and love into his ears
- What is so tragic is he doesn't realize that God in no way loves him any less now than he ever did—God's love is not fickle or vacillating
- But Job is lamenting the loss of those days—remembering how it was back then
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John Schultz: Job's mentioning of "the good old days" is more than a sentimental effort to recapture the past. Job wants to prove that his present low state is not the result of unrighteousness and insensitivity in dealing with people who came in contact with him. People respected him, not merely because of his status of prosperity, but because of his spiritual testimony of intimate fellowship with God and his compassionate treatment of the underprivileged.

We may consider Job's reminiscence of his past glory to be the deepest point of his moral misery and decay. Spiritual victories are only won in the present, never in the past. We only tend to go back to the past when we feel unable to face the present.

Albert Barnes: It may seem, perhaps, that in this chapter there is a degree of self-commendation and praise altogether inconsistent with that consciousness of deep unworthiness which a truly pious man should have. How, it may be asked, can this spirit be consistent with religion? Can a man who has any proper sense of the depravity of his heart, speak thus in commendation of his own righteousness, and recount with such apparent satisfaction his own good deeds? Would not true piety be more distrustful of self, and be less disposed, to magnify its own doings? And is there not here a recalling to recollection of former honors, in a manner which shows that the heart was more attached to them than that of a man whose hope is in heaven should be? It may not be possible to vindicate Job in this respect altogether, nor is it necessary for us to attempt to prove that he was entirely perfect. We are to remember, also, the age in which he lived; we are not to measure what he said and did by the knowledge which we have, and the clearer light which shines upon us. We are to bear in recollection the circumstances in which he was placed, and perhaps we shall find in them a mitigation for what seems to us to exhibit such a spirit of self-reliance, and which looks so much like the lingering love of the honors of this world. Particularly we may recall the following considerations:

(1) He was vindicating himself from charges of enormous guilt and hypocrisy. To meet these charges, he runs over the leading events of his life, and shows what had been his general aim and purpose. He reminds them, also, of the respect and honor which had been shown him by those who best knew him - by the poor the needy, the inhabitants of

his own city, the people of his own tribe. To vindicate himself from the severe charges which had been alleged against him, it was not improper thus to advert to the general course of his life, and to refer to the respect in which he had been held. Who could know him better than his neighbors? Who could be better witnesses than the poor whom he had relieved; and the lame, the blind, the sorrowful, whom he had comforted? Who could better testify to his character than they who had followed his counsel in times of perplexity and danger? Who would be more competent witnesses than the mourners whom he had comforted?

(2) It was a main object with Job to show the greatness of his distress and misery, and for this purpose he went into an extended statement of his former happiness, and especially of the respect which had been shown him. This he contrasts beautifully with his present condition, and the colors of the picture are greatly heightened by the contrast. In forming our estimate of this chapter, we should take this object into the account, and should not charge him with a design to magnify his own righteousness, when his main purpose was only to exhibit the extent and depth of his present woes.

(3) It is not improper for a man to speak of his former prosperity and happiness in the manner in which Job did. He does not speak of himself as having any merit, or as relying on this for salvation. He distinctly traces it all to God (**Job 29:2-5**), and says that it was because he blessed him that he had enjoyed these comforts. It was not an improper acknowledgment of the mercies which he had received from his hand, and the remembrance was fitted to excite his gratitude. And although there may seem to us something like parade and ostentation in thus dwelling on former honors, and recounting what he had done in days that were past, yet we should remember how natural it was for him, in the circumstances of trial in which he then was, to revert to past scenes, and to recall the times of prosperity, and the days when he enjoyed the favor of God.

(4) It may be added, that few people have ever lived to whom this description would be applicable. It must have required uncommon and very remarkable worth to have made it proper for him thus to speak, and to be able to say all this so as not to be exposed to contradiction. The description is one of great beauty, and presents a lovely picture of patriarchal piety, and of the respect which then was shown to eminent virtue and worth. It is an illustration of the respect that will be, and that ought to be, shown to one who is upright in his dealings with people, benevolent toward the poor and the helpless, and steady in his walk with God.

TEXT: Job 30:1-31

TITLE: FOCUS ON THE PRESENT – LAMENTING THE DEPTHS OF SHAME AND SUFFERING

BIG IDEA:

UNJUST SUFFERING AND DERISIVE SOCIAL ATTACKS UNLEASH PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL AGONY WHEN GOD REMAINS SILENT

INTRODUCTION:

Tremper Longman: Chapter 30 continues on from Job's comments in the previous chapter. There he remembered the good old days when God liked him and he prospered and was honored. He did the right things and he fully expected to die in his blessed condition. This chapter now describes how his life has transformed from blessing to curse. He believes that this change is totally unjust since he has done nothing to deserve it, so in the next chapter (31) he will protest his innocence and announce his intention to confront God over this indignity.

In the first part of **chap. 30**, Job bemoans that he is no longer respected by old and young, noble or not, as he was in earlier days (**vv. 1–10**). Indeed, the very scum of the earth, whose description occupies the majority of these verses, laugh at him. **Verses 11–15** accuse God of humiliating him, and in his shame and weakness a mob then comes to harass him. He is deeply afraid and shamed. He feels as if God has mugged him (**vv. 16–19**). While he has appealed to God, God has not responded to him (**vv. 20–23**). Job ends by saying that God should have helped him or anyone who is suffering as he is (**vv. 24–31**). After all, even he, a human, helps those who appeal to him for help. His optimism has turned to pessimism.

Francis Andersen: In **chapter 3** his attention was narrowly focused on his immediate pain. In **chapter 30**, he is more widely aware of the social and spiritual dimensions of his predicament. This is perhaps the most pathetic of all Job's poems of grief, and a fitting finish to all the earlier ones. It is more subdued, more reflective, less defiant. It shows Job in his weakness, no longer able to hope for even one touch of friendliness from men or God.

David Thompson: Job was a hurting man. He was mocked by society, he was in pain physically, he was abandoned spiritually and he was hurting emotionally. He could think about all the positive things he once previously experienced, but that did not change the reality of the way life really was. He was a hurting man and this chapter of Job makes that point very clear.

Growing out of **chapter 29**, **Job 30** dwells on the complete reversal of all Job's relationships. What God has done to him (**verses 16–23**) is set in the middle of what

men have done to him (1–15; 24–31); but these are not two distinguishable experiences, and the whole poem is a tumult. Conflicting emotions gather in Job’s soul. He is abject, scornful, outraged, forlorn. . .

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

Elmer Smick: The contrast between **chapter 29** and **chapter 30** is purposeful and forceful. The threefold use of “*But/and now*” in **30:1, 9, 16** ties the chapter together and reveals the author’s contrastive intention. Moreover, the first verb seems to be used to heighten the contrastive effect. In **29:24** Job said (lit.), “*I laughed [šḥq] at them*” (at his people who were discouraged) and now (**30:1**) a brood of ruffians (lit.) “*laugh [šḥq] at me.*” . . . Throughout **30:1–15** Job expands this theme: **the loss of his dignity**. If one feels he has exaggerated his honor in **chapter 29**, the hyperbole on his loss of honor in **chapter 30** is even more extreme. **Verses 3–8** are typical. Having your peers mock you is bad; but to prove how honorless he is, Job tells how boys, whose fathers he could not trust to handle his sheepdogs, mock him.

To achieve a full measure of contrast, Job dwelt on the negative side of the three themes of **chapter 29** in the following order: **honor, blessing, and benevolence**. The removal of God’s blessing is far worse than affliction by people, so it is put in the climactic central position. The contrastive arrangement is as follows:

I. No Honor from Men (vv.1–15)

- A. Young mockers and their elders (vv.1–8; cf. 29:7–11)
- B. Job assaulted (vv.9–15; cf. 29:21–25)

II. No Blessing from God (vv.16–23; cf. 29:2–6, 18–20)

- A. Job suffers (vv.16–17)
- B. God afflicts (vv.18–19)
- C. Job pleads (v.20)
- D. God afflicts (vv.21–23)

III. No Benevolence for Job (vv.24–31; cf. 29:12–17)

- A. Plea for mercy and help (v.24)
- B. Reminder of his benevolence (v.25)
- C. No benevolence for Job (v.26)
- D. Result: his present condition (vv.27–31)

Joseph Benson: Job’s honour is turned into contempt, **Job 30:1-14**. His prosperity into fears, pains, and a sense of the wrath of God, **Job 30:15-22**. He looks for nothing but death, **Job 30:23**. And rest therein, **Job 30:24**. Reflects on his former sympathy with the afflicted, **Job 30:25**. And describes his own present calamities, **Job 30:26-31**.

John Hartley: After recounting his past blessings and the respect he had in the assembly, Job laments the depths of his shame and the severity of his suffering. He is deeply distressed that he is scorned by all, even the desert rabble. He also cries out from the piercing pains that torment him. It is very distressing to Job that he sees God's mighty hand behind his suffering. Moreover, God's silence to his pleas exasperates him. In anguish he laments like a psalmist who sings a psalm of lament to the tune of the harp and flute.

This lament is artfully structured in relationship to his remembrance (**ch. 29**). In the lament Job speaks of the shame caused by external forces, then of his personal blessings and then the honor others bestowed on him. The three sections of this lament are

- Job's present disgrace (**vv. 1-15**);
- an accusation against God (**vv. 16-23**) and
- a self-lament (**vv. 24-31**).

Roy Zuck: Job bewailed his present misery, which contrasted so starkly with his pre-disease days. He now was

- Disrespected socially (**vv. 1-15**),
- In pain physically (**vv. 16-19**),
- Abandoned spiritually (**vv. 20-23**),
- Opposed socially (**vv. 24-26**), and
- Exhausted physically and emotionally (**vv. 27-31**).

I. (:1-15) ASSAULTED BY CONTEMPTIBLE MOCKERS

A. (:1-8) Ridiculed by the Dregs of Society

Francis Andersen: Job has exchanged the respect of the most respectable for the contempt of the most contemptible. Something of patrician pride comes through Job's disdain for the dregs of society who now (1) make him their laughing-song. Such despicable persons are in no position to look down on Job, for they are the lowest of society, living like animals (3, 4, 6, 7). Less than human, this gang is rightly expelled from where decent people live (5, 8).

1. (:1) Contemptible by Virtue of Their Youth and Lowly Status

*"But now those younger than I mock me,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock."*

Tremper Longman: Job feels ridiculed by youths who are more contemptible than their fathers, more contemptible than dogs.

John Hartley: The displaced desert rabble deride Job, hurling taunts at him as they pass by. These mockers are doubly odious to him by reason of their youth and their lowly status. In those days the young were to show respect to their elders. But the most deplorable youths mock Job, who had been the most respected person in the community. . . . Job also makes a play on the word *deride* (*sahaq*). Whereas he had

smiled (sahaq) on the assembly inspiring confidence (29:24), now the rabble *deride* or smile derisively (*sahaq*) at him.

Poole: Dogs are everywhere mentioned with contempt, as filthy, unprofitable, and accursed creatures; as **2 Samuel 16:9; 2 Kings 8:13; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15.**

2. (:2-8) Contemptible by Virtue of Their Despicable Characteristics

John MacArthur: Job described these mockers as dissipated vagabonds who, because of their uselessness and wickedness, were not welcome in society, so were driven out of the land. These base men had made Job the object of their sordid entertainment (vv. 9-15).

John Hartley: To stress his outrage at such mockery Job enumerates the despicable characteristics of those who reproach him. They lack strength and vigor. *Gaunt from want and hunger*, they have become outcasts, roaming the desolate, dry steppe in search of food and shelter. They *pluck saltwort*, a perennial shrub identified as *atriplex halimus*, which because of its saltiness is eaten only in dire circumstances. From the broom tree, *retama roetam*, one of the larger plants in the desolate regions of Sinai and the Dead Sea, they collect roots, possibly to make into charcoals (cf. **Ps. 120:4**).

When these scoundrels enter a city, the citizens are appalled, fearing that such riffraff might snatch anything in sight. As soon as they spot them, they drive them out, shouting “Thief!” Never extending any courtesy to them, the citizens refuse to let them dwell in the village. These vagabonds, therefore, must find shelter in the rugged terrain of the steppe, which, being cut through with deep wadis, offers hiding places under cliffs and in caves. Huddled among the shrubs for shelters, they *bray* from their deep-seated hunger.

These repulsive outcasts are called a *foolish, nameless brood* (lit. “*sons of a fool*” and “*sons without a name*”). Belonging to the class of hardened fools (*nebalim*), they continually manifest their incorrigible folly. Noted for their impious, surly nature (**Isa. 32:5-6**) and haughty speech (**Prov. 17:7**), they are men without a name, i.e., they have not honor.

a. (:2-4) Weak and Wasted

*“Indeed, what good was the strength of their hands to me?
Vigor had perished from them.*

3 From want and famine they are gaunt

Who gnaw the dry ground by night in waste and desolation,

4 Who pluck mallow by the bushes,

And whose food is the root of the broom shrub.”

b. (:5-8) Wandering and Whimpering

“They are driven from the community;

*They shout against them as against a thief,
6 So that they dwell in dreadful valleys,
In holes of the earth and of the rocks.
7 Among the bushes they cry out;
Under the nettles they are gathered together.
8 Fools, even those without a name,
They were scourged from the land."*

Tremper Longman: Job pictures people in a desperate search for food to keep themselves alive. They are "*in want and hunger*" (v. 3). They "*gnaw the desert*," obviously a place with few resources to sustain them. They do their best, though, as they gather mallow from bushes and eat the root of the broom tree (v. 4). They are not out of the city by their own decision, but they have been compelled to leave by those who live there ("*they are driven out from human society*," v. 5a). Their treatment may be the result of criminal activity ("*they shout at them as if they are robbers*," v. 5b). As mentioned, they have no permanent homes. Rather they live in the many caves that may be found in wadi walls in Israel. In other words, **they live like animals**. Job even likens them to the donkey when he says they "*bray among the bushes*."

It is these types of people who treat him so badly. They sing songs about him, and he has become a byword among them.

B. (:9-15) Rebuffed by Their Unrestrained Taunts and Attacks

1. (:9-10) Unrestrained Taunts

*"And now I have become their taunt,
I have even become a byword to them.
10 They abhor me and stand aloof from me,
And they do not refrain from spitting at my face."*

2. (:11-14) Unrestrained Attacks

a. (:11) Imagery of Loosed Bowstring

*"Because He has loosed His bowstring and afflicted me,
They have cast off the bridle before me."*

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

John Hartley: Job looks beyond these dregs and names God as the cause of his disgrace. God has *loosed* his cord [*yeter*] and afflicted him. In this metaphor Job compares his body to a tent. Since God has slackened the central cord, the tent sags. In response to

God's action against his own servant, the wicked cast *off restraint* and freely abuse God's servant. By vividly recounting the misery that God's harsh treatment causes him, Job is desperately seeking to arouse God's sympathy for him.

Albert Barnes: According to this translation, the reference here is to God, and the sense is, that the reason why he was thus derided and contemned by such a worthless race was, that God had **unloosened his cord**. That is, God had rendered him incapable of vindicating himself, or of inflicting punishment. The figure, according to this interpretation, is taken from a bow, and Job means to say that his bow was relaxed, his vigor was gone, and they now felt that they might insult him with impunity. But instead of the usual reading in the Hebrew text יתרי yithriy - "*my nerve*," another reading יתרו yithriv - "*his nerve*," is found in the qeri (margin). This reading has been adopted in the text by **Jahn**, and is regarded as genuine by **Rosenmuller**, **Umbreit**, and **Noyes**. According to this, the meaning is, that the worthless rabble that now treated him with so much contempt, had **relaxed all restraint**, and they who had hitherto been under some curb, now rushed upon him in the most unbridled manner. They had cast off all restraint arising from respect to his rank, standing, moral worth, and the dread of his power, and now treated him with every kind of indignity.

- b. (:12-14) Imagery of Besieged City
 *"On the right hand their brood arises;
 They thrust aside my feet
 and build up against me their ways of destruction.
13 They break up my path,
 They profit from my destruction,
 No one restrains them.
14 As through a wide breach they come,
 Amid the tempest they roll on."*

Elmer Smick: These verses begin with a line that takes us right back to **29:20**, where Job mused on his former life as a hero with his bow ever new in his hand. But here God has unstrung his bow, resulting in the opposite situation as pictured in **29:21–25**. Job's tribe had gathered about to hear every good word that fell from the lips of their benevolent leader. But here he is no longer leading the way like "*a king among his troops*" (**29:25**). Instead, he sees himself like a city under siege

Tremper Longman: Job points the finger at God: God is responsible for the fact that Job is at the mercy of such despicable people. God has "*loosened his bowstring*." Of course, to loosen a bowstring makes the bow ineffective as a weapon. Job uses the image to describe his uselessness. His **ineffectiveness** is a cause for shame on his part and the occasion for the mob to rise up against him. When he was strong, these vicious people needed to be careful around him, but no more. Nothing restrains them from attacking him directly. Indeed, in much of the description of their assault in the following verses, Job describes himself as a **besieged city**. But first they lay him prone by knocking his feet out from under him. He is lying flat when they build paths up to him. Modern readers might here think of *Gulliver's Travels* and the Lilliputians' assault on Gulliver.

In Job, the mob builds up paths (probably a reference to siege ramps) against him. In v. 13b, though, Job uses the term “*path*” to refer to his life. While they build up their paths to attack him, they tear down his paths. They do this for their own advantage and do not need the help of anyone else since Job is so weak (v. 13c).

3. (:15) Unrestrained Terrors

*“Terrors are turned against me,
They pursue my honor as the wind,
And my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.”*

Tremper Longman: In the face of this onslaught, Job feels **great terror**. Such fear transforms him from a confident and strong individual to a sniveling fearful man (“*they put my dignity in flight like the wind*”). Finally, he remarks that he has **lost all hope**. It has passed quickly and without tangible effect like a cloud.

John Hartley: As a result of this attack, his **dignity** has been driven away and his well-being has vanished like a cloud. Job laments that he has lost not only the dignity of his position as leading elder but also the serenity his vast estate provided.

II. (:16-23) AFFLICTED BY UNRESPONSIVE GOD

Elmer Smick: Job shifts from this sorry relationship with people to an even sorrier subject, **the removal of God’s blessing** from his life. He cries out to God but gets no answer. When God was his friend, it was like having a light over him in the midst of darkness (29:3). But at this time his days are full of suffering and his nights of misery (v.16). These verses are important in that they show us that Job’s basic complaint still remains. It is not only God’s silence (v.20) but especially his violent treatment of Job that has become the sufferer’s greatest problem. It would be no problem at all if only Job’s concept of God were limited. That not being the case, in Job’s mind, it must be God who is responsible for all this.

A. (:16-19) Unrelieved Agony While Afflicted by God

1. (:16-17) Agony of Job

*“And now my soul is poured out within me;
Days of affliction have seized me.
17 At night it pierces my bones within me,
And my gnawing pains take no rest.”*

Francis Andersen: In a final burst of grief, Job wrestles with the sheer pain of his disease as if it were objectively a terrifying monster, chewing at his flesh day and night.

2. (:18-19) Afflicted by God

*“By a great force my garment is distorted;
It binds me about as the collar of my coat.*

*He has cast me into the mire,
And I have become like dust and ashes.”*

B. (:20-23) Unanswered Appeal While Afflicted by God

1. (:20) Appeal of Job

*“I cry out to Thee for help,
but Thou dost not answer me;
I stand up,
and Thou dost turn Thy attention against me.”*

2. (:21-23) Afflicted by God

*“Thou hast become cruel to me;
With the might of Thy hand Thou dost persecute me.
22 Thou dost lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride;
And Thou dost dissolve me in a storm.
23 For I know that Thou wilt bring me to death
And to the house of meeting for all living.”*

David Atkinson: The **silence of God** is the hardest of all. ‘*I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer*’ (30:20). That is the hardest cruelty – what seems to be the cruelty of God.

Tremper Longman: **God does not respond to him.** Job now turns to God and speaks to him directly, but as he quickly points out, God does not answer him. Job needs help, but God does not pay any attention to the sufferer. God barely acknowledges him as Job tries to get his attention. Job takes this unresponsiveness as a sign of displeasure. God hates him and is cruel toward him. According to v. 22, he feels as if God has just blasted him with the wind of the storm, perhaps an anticipation of the coming theophany, where God will speak to Job out of a whirlwind (38:1). Job ends by saying that he is certain God is trying to kill him, though he also acknowledges that all living things end up in that “house.”

Elmer Smick: Job sees his problem with God as twofold.

- First, God will not answer him; and,
- Second, God actively afflicts him.

This is exactly the bifold nature of his complaint in 13:20–27, even including the point of his being tossed about by the wind (13:25). As reflected in that speech (chs. 13–14), Job’s only prospect for the future is death (v.23). What is so devastating to Job is not the fear of death, for he has already asked for it as a relief (6:8–10; 14:3), but that he should have to face it with God as his enemy (13:24). God’s constant attack, his ruthless might (v.21), is so completely the opposite of Job’s “*intimate friendship*” with God in those bygone days when he still perceived that God was on his side (29:4–5).

John Hartley: Job complains boldly that God has *grown cruel* (‘*akzar*’) toward him. Because he has assailed Job with such might, Job believes that God *acts hatefully* (*satam*) against him. Most likely the author is making a play on the verb *satam*, “act

hatefully,” and the title *Satan* (*satan*; cf. **1:6; 16:9**). God has acted so bitterly against him that Job feels that God is his foe, his *satan*. That is, Job is poignantly accusing God of cherishing animosity against him.

Spurgeon: Under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die; he feared that God would not relax the blows of his hand until his body became a ruin, and then he would have rest. But he did not die at that time. He was fully recovered, and God gave him twice as much as he had before. A life of usefulness, and happiness, and honor lay before him; and yet he had set up his own tombstone, and reckoned himself a dead man.

III. (:24-31) AGONIZED OVER UNJUST SUFFERING

Francis Andersen: The remaining strophe (**24–31**) is a counterpoise to the opening lament, and highlights once more the contrast between his ‘*days of affliction*’ (**27**) and his ‘*autumn days*’ (**29:4**). . .

The main cause of his distress is the unaccountable injustice of his present plight. Although the meaning of **verse 24** is quite obscure, in the light of **verse 25** it could present the picture of a person ‘*in ruins*’ stretching out a hand for help which no common humanity would deny. Certainly Job had never ignored such an appeal; indeed, my soul grieved for the poor. **Verses 28–31** enlarge on his plight. Only the wild animals offer him hideous company (**29**); his appearance is repulsive (**28, 30**); his voice harsh and hoarse (**31**).

Elmer Smick: These verses complete the contrast with **chapter 29**. Here Job is in the position of those poor wretches to whom his heart and strength went out in 29:12–17. As a summation of his case, he packs his argument with **emotion** and **righteous indignation**. Justice is all on his side. The very benevolence he so freely had dispensed (**v.25**) he now looks for in vain (**v.26**). **Verse 26** also reminds us of his expectations in **29:18–20**. So here (**vv.27–31**) he presents himself to the court as he is, his body marred and burning with fever; he himself is exhibit A. As he often does, Job closes the stanza (**v.31**) with a strong figure of speech (cf. **29:6, 14, 17, 25; 30:15**). His “*path [had been] drenched with cream*” (cf. **29:6**), now his “*harp is tuned to mourning and [his] flute to the sound of wailing*” (**30:31**).

A. (:24-25) Agony of Being Denied Deliverance after Helping Others

1. (:24) Personal Cry for Help

“Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand,
Or in his disaster therefore cry out for help?”

2. (:25) Practical Compassion Displayed towards the Afflicted

“Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the needy?”

B. (:26) Agony of Frustrated Expectations

*“When I expected good, then evil came;
When I waited for light, then darkness came.”*

C. (:27-30) Agony of Intense Suffering and Lonely Mourning

*“I am seething within, and cannot relax;
Days of affliction confront me.
28 I go about mourning without comfort;
I stand up in the assembly and cry out for help.
29 I have become a brother to jackals,
And a companion of ostriches.
30 My skin turns black on me,
And my bones burn with fever.”*

Tremper Longman: Job is in tremendous turmoil, which he describes as his innards boiling. He is deeply agitated because he is suffering with no apparent way out of his mess (v. 27). **Verse 28** gives us a picture of listless wandering in deep sadness. He mourns “*without passion*,” which I take to mean that he is stunned, bewildered. It is possible, though, that the phrase translated “*without passion*” could mean “*without sunlight*.” In other words, he walks around mourning at night. The phrase is literally “*without heat*,” and my translation takes the heat as a reference to his state of mind, while the alternate takes it as a reference to the sun. While admittedly Job has just referred to the boiling inside him, he could now be referring to this stunned astonishment at his condition. He appeals for help in the assembly, which had previously listened in silence to his every word (29:8–10).

He ends the chapter by describing his suffering yet again. He relates himself to the jackal and the eagle owl, creatures that inhabit ruins (see v. 24; Ps. 44:19; Jer. 9:11; 10:22; Isa. 34:13; Lam. 5:18). They are **scavenger animals** that haunt lonely places. **Verse 30** describes the horrible effects of his disease on his body, both externally (“*my skin turns black*”) and internally (“*my bones burn from the heat*”). His music is a dirge that accompanies his weeping and mourning.

John Hartley: The jackal’s howl is a doleful, mourning sound, said to sound like the wailing of a child, while the ostrich gives out a hissing moan. Their moaning cries convey the stark loneliness of the steppe. Job feels so lonely that he senses that his only companions are these animals in their doleful crying.

D. (:31) Agony of Funeral Dirge

*“Therefore my harp is turned to mourning,
And my flute to the sound of those who weep.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are we so surprised when our fortunes and circumstances change so dramatically?
- 2) What emboldens weak people to attack those who have fallen on hard times?
- 3) How do we respond when it seems like God has turned a deaf ear to our suffering?
- 4) Have you ever experienced the loneliness of suffering and mourning without any sustaining comfort and encouragement from others?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tremper Longman: Job feels **humiliated by God**. He has become the brunt of laughter from even the lowest strata of society. Though the text does not specify, they likely jeer him because of his suffering and weakened position, which they associate with sin. **Shame** robs him of joy and plunges him into the darkness of depression.

John Hartley: Job suffers totally. His body is bent over by pain. His emotions are distraught. He is disgraced, being taunted by the dregs of society. The contrast between his former glory and his present disgrace is stark. Abandoned by all, Job laments the full scope of his misery. Against this background Job will offer his oath of innocence. The lament underscores the strength of Job's conviction and the desperation that have led him to swear the oath of innocence.

Derek Kidner: Job's pain is continuous (30:16-17), humiliating (30:18-19), merciless (30:20-21), violent (30:22) and deadly (30:23). The metaphors are gripping: Job feels that his soul, his very vitality, has been poured out like water from a jar. Every part of his body aches.

Warren Wiersbe: By refusing to live in the past and by honestly facing reality, Job took a giant step in maturity and integrity. In his lament, Job contrasted his present situation with the past and showed how everything had been changed by the judgment of god. His five "complaints" parallel the joys that he named in chapter 29:

"I have no respect" (30:1-15; see 29:7-11)

"I have no blessing" (30:16-23; see 29:2-6)

"I have no help" (30:24-25, see 29:12-17)

“I have no future” (30:26-28, see 29:18-20)

“I have no ministry” (30:29-31, see 29:21-25)

Kenneth Klett: O Lord, Why?

“Mine is not to question why, mine is just to do or die” – so the saying goes. While this is often true, and especially true when it comes to the clear directives of God, it is a **platitude** just like so much of the advice Job’s friends offer him. But sometimes things just aren’t clear and we become **perplexed** by some of the challenges we face in life. Dark providences can make it particularly difficult as we know that our God is sovereign. Thus, **Job’s many questions**. His struggles are overwhelming and are causing great mental and spiritual upheaval. He asks his friends questions that are often tainted with sarcasm, but his questions to God are sober and direct. That said, he does stand on the edge, and may even cross the line into irreverence and even accusation in the intensity of his desperate inquiries. When God gives clear answers, we can rest in His revealed wisdom. When life is hard and His ways are veiled to us, we will have questions and we may and in fact must go to Him with them, but with all **reverence** and **fear**. In the end, whether we get answers or not we can rest assured that, somehow, all things are working out for our good – and that is not a platitude, that is a promise from God.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/830211435104468.pdf>

David Thompson: Practical Lessons:

1. If you are truly righteous, you may lose your social status.
2. If you are truly righteous, there may be times when you only have God to lean on.
3. If you are truly righteous, there may be times when even God seems far removed.
4. If you are truly righteous, Satan will eventually flee and God will eventually bless.

TEXT: Job 31:1-40

TITLE: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE – OATH OF INNOCENCE

BIG IDEA:

EVEN JOB’S DRAMATIC OATH OF INNOCENCE CANNOT FORCE GOD TO BREAK HIS SILENCE AND ADDRESS HIS UNJUST SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: After having reminisced about the glory of his former days and having lamented his present disgrace, Job swears an oath of innocence in a final move to prove that he is not guilty of any wrongdoing. The oath requires God either to activate the curses of the oath or to clear the swearer. Should God remain silent, Job would be declared innocent by not being cursed. A common formula for an oath of innocence is, “May God do such to me, if I do (or do not do) so and so.” The swearer usually suppresses the actual curse either with evasive language or abbreviated formulas, no doubt fearful of the very verbalizing of a specific curse. But Job is so bold that four times he specifies the curse that should befall him if he be guilty (**vv. 8, 10, 22, 40**). His reckless bravery reflects his unwavering confidence in his own innocence. . .

It is clear that Job knows that one is accountable not only for overt acts of sin but also for contemplating immoral behavior and cherishing cruel, vengeful thoughts against others. His moral insight is highly refined, pointing toward the Sermon on the Mount.

Elmer Smick: Under oath the subject lists the evil things he has not done with the hope he will be vindicated and pass through the portals unscathed. Although the form is negative, Job’s oration has a positive purpose as an attestation of loyalty to God as his sovereign Lord. To make this effective he calls down curses on his own head if his words are proved false.

Francis Andersen: **Job 31** lists specific crimes, denying them all. The form Job uses is, ‘If I have done X, then let Y happen to me!’ X is the crime; Y is the penalty. Since Job is handing everything over to God, not to a human court, there is no call for man’s testimony, since God sees everything (**28:24**). And the sentence is not a statutory penalty, such as a commensurate fine or reparation. It is some act of God. Its character as punishment for a particular sin takes the form of poetic justice. God arranges for someone else to do the same thing to the culprit by way of retaliation. Job fully endorses the *lex talionis* and affirms the doctrine that you reap what you sow. Thus he expects that the price he would pay for committing adultery with his neighbour’s wife would be that Job’s neighbour would commit adultery with Job’s wife (**31:9, 10**).

The list of crimes in Job’s negative confession is **neither systematic nor complete**. It was not drawn up by an articulated clerk. It is a poem, recited by a miserable outcast on the city rubbish dump, not by a prisoner in the dock. It is Job’s last passionate outburst, and

the author has given it an earnestness and a torrential quality by composing it with a measure of **incoherence**. This effectively conveys Job's persistent indignation. This effect is lost when the loose ends are tidied up and the speech is made like a page from a barrister's brief. . .

While all but one of the failures he disowns are crimes against his fellow men (the exception is idolatry in **verses 26f.**), such acts are odious because they are offensive to God (23), not just injurious to society. An act of injustice against the meanest slave would be heinous in God's sight because each and every human being is precious to him (15) and under his immediate protection.

David Clines: As Job's final speech now moves into its third movement, the **tone** changes dramatically. In the first movement (**chap. 29**) he had been **nostalgic**, in the second (**chap. 30**) **bitter**, but now in the third he rises again to the challenge his treatment by God has set him. Here the tone is from the beginning a more **confident**, more **aggressive** one. Now he will take matters into his own hand with an **oath of exculpation**, which will testify that there is no reason in himself for God's attack on him, and that, by implication, God has acted arbitrarily or even unjustly toward him. He may have been robbed by God of all he owned, but he is still a prince, and it is "*like a prince*" that he will approach him (v 37)—**with dignity and self-assurance**.

The Pulpit Commentary: The conclusion of Job's long speech (**ch. 26-31**) is now reached. He winds it up by a solemn vindication of himself from all the charges of wicked conduct which have been alleged or insinuated against him. Perhaps it may be said that he goes further, maintaining generally his moral rectitude in respect of all the principal duties which a man owes either to God (**vers. 4-6, 24-28, 35-37**) or to his fellows (**vers. 1-3, 7-23, 29-34, 38-40**).

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

I. (:1-34) TOP TEN LIST OF AVOIDED SINS

1. (:1-4) Lust

David Clines: In this preface to his oaths against himself, Job sets out the principles by which he has lived. He works entirely with the expectation of **just retribution**: calamity befalls the unrighteous (v 3). He does not mean, presumably, that he has done what is right only to avoid punishment; he must mean that he is not such a fool as to lay himself open to divine wrath for misconduct. If God sees everything—indeed, if he "*counts*" Job's steps—Job cannot afford to have anything in his life that needs to be hidden. Job is not complaining that he has no privacy from the divine gaze; he has no

quarrel with the principle of accountability, only with God's failure to implement what has been given out as his own policy.

David Thompson: Job had been a very wealthy, powerful and successful man. He had a wife and he had children. There is no question that wealthy, powerful and successful men tend to draw unmarried, beautiful women toward them. Every now and then you will see some old geeky-looking Hollywood film director who seems to have some young pretty woman at his side. That is the way the world works. Job did not think or act like that.

a. (:1) Covenant with the Eyes

*"I Have made a covenant with my eyes;
How then could I gaze at a virgin."*

Elmer Smick: Job's making a covenant with his eyes is not merely a promise not to lust after a girl. The sin he has in mind is more fundamental, or it would not command this position in the poem. Job is emphatically denying an especially insidious and widespread form of idolatry: devotion to the *betûlâ* ("the girl [maiden]"), **the goddess of fertility**. As the Venus of the Semitic world, she was variously known as the Maiden Anat in Ugaritic (ANET, 132–33), Ashtoreth in preexilic Israel (**Jdg 2:13; 10:6; 1Sa 7:3–4; 1Ki 11:5, 33**), and Ishtar in Babylonian sources, wherein she is described as "laden with vitality, charm, and voluptuousness" (ANET, 383). She is probably the **Queen of Heaven** mentioned in **Jeremiah 7:18** and **44:16–19**. . .

Not all accept the text here as a reference to the goddess. **Driver** and **Gray** understand **vv.1–4** as a general claim to a virtuous life, giving God's judgment on evil as the grounds that have led to a choice virtue. Such an understanding of **v.1** is rather narrow to express such a general claim, but on this point **Andersen**, 240–41, agrees with **Driver** and **Gray**.

Tremper Longman: The OT does condemn **lust** through the tenth commandment (**Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21**), which includes the provision not to covet a neighbor's wife. However, the OT does not specifically say that a man, even a married man, cannot desire an unmarried woman. After all, he could marry her. This observation leads some to suggest that Job is not disavowing leering at a human virgin, but at the divine virgin, Asherah. **I find this view unlikely**, however. Idolatry is not seen as an issue in Job. He is never accused of idolatry. Besides, if we are right that Job is an Edomite (and not a Canaanite or Israelite), then Asherah, a Canaanite goddess, would not be a temptation. The best explanation is that Job is being extremely careful in his morality.

John Hartley: In the OT the eyes were considered the gateway to the heart, for their gaze may arouse the deepest desires and so spur their owner to transgress God's laws (e.g., **Gen. 3:6; 2 Sam. 11:2; cf. Sir. 9:8; Matt. 5:28**). The people were, therefore, enjoined to remember God's commandments and not prostitute themselves by following the lusts of their hearts and eyes (**Num. 15:39**).

b. (:2-3) Calamity of Judgment = Consequences of Sin

*“And what is the portion of God from above
Or the heritage of the Almighty from on high?
3 Is it not calamity to the unjust,
And disaster to those who work iniquity?”*

David Guzik: In the context of Job’s self-control when it came to lust, he considered what the *allotment of God* from above was. He understood that the young woman he would be enticed to look upon was not the allotment of God for him; she and her nakedness did not belong to Job in any sense.

i. **Leviticus 18:1-18** reinforces this Biblical principle. It relates how the nakedness of an individual “*belongs*” to that individual and to their spouse, and it does not “*belong*” to anyone else. Therefore, when a man looks upon the nakedness of a woman who is not his wife, he takes something that does not belong to him.

ii. There certainly existed some type of **pornography** in Job’s day; some of the earliest artistic images are of women and men in highly sexualized motifs. Nevertheless, Job certainly did not have to contend with the sophisticated, gigantic, and far-reaching modern pornography industry. The availability of modern pornography has made it a significantly greater challenge for men to confine their visual arousal to the allotment of God from above for them.

iii. In this context, it is helpful for a man to ask himself: “Whose nakedness belongs to me, and whose does not?” Only a proud and depraved man would think that every woman’s nakedness belongs to him. A moment of thought reinforces the clear principle: only the nakedness of his own wife is the allotment of God from above for a man; only his own wife is the inheritance of the Almighty from on high for his visual arousal.

John Hartley: Job ponders the consequences of pursuing iniquity. The portion that God assigns *the unrighteous*, i.e., *the workers of iniquity*, is disaster (*‘ed*) or ruin (*neker*; cf. **18:12; 21:17, 30**). God breaks the prosperity of the wicked by causing a disaster to wipe out everything he has (cf. **Prov. 6:15**). A disaster fills a person with panic (cf. **Prov. 1:26-27**). Wishing to avoid such a frightening situation, Job has snuffed out every longing to sin.

c. (:4) Accountability before God Who Sees All

*“Does He not see my ways,
And number all my steps?”*

David Clines: The idea of the steps or way of humans being open to the sight of God is common especially in the wisdom literature; cf. **Pss 33:13; 69:5 (6); 94:11; 119:168; 139:1-4; Prov 5:21; Jer 23:24**.

2. (:5-6) Falsehood

*“If I have walked with falsehood,
And my foot has hastened after deceit,
6 Let Him weigh me with accurate scales,
And let God know my integrity.”*

Francis Andersen: vv. 5-8 – Dishonesty: Job denies falsehood and deceit. That he thought of integrity as inward is shown by his marvellous definition of covetousness as the heart following the eyes (7). The self-curse of crop failure (8) suggests that **verse 5** refers to shady business practices. While falsehood and deceit are abstractions which might be personified as Job’s companions, it is possible that the nouns are used as collectives for the concrete ‘false’ and ‘deceitful’ associates.

3. (:7-8) Covetousness

*“If my step has turned from the way,
Or my heart followed my eyes,
Or if any spot has stuck to my hands,
8 Let me sow and another eat,
And let my crops be uprooted.”*

4. (:9-12) Adultery

*“If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
Or I have lurked at my neighbor’s doorway,
10 May my wife grind for another,
And let others kneel down over her.
11 For that would be a lustful crime;
Moreover, it would be an iniquity punishable by judges.
12 For it would be fire that consumes to Abaddon,
And would uproot all my increase.”*

Elmer Smick: From here to **v.23** Job clears himself of social sins. The sin of adultery heads the list (**v.9**). In the biblical world adultery was heinous, because it struck at the roots of the family and clan. It meant, as is clear here, relations with another man’s wife. In Hammurabi’s Code it did not have to be a capital offense, but in the Mosaic Law it was (**Lev 20:10**). Here Job’s hypothetical sin calls for “eye-for-eye” justice—the same would happen to his wife. In the versions and the Talmud, **v.10a** is also thought to have sexual connotations since the parallel in **v.10b** is explicit (**Pope**, 231; Gordis, Job, 346).

John Hartley: These words picture Job’s observing a neighbor’s house stealthily, watching for an opportune moment when, undetected, he could make intimate contact with the lady of the house, *door* may have a double meaning: access to his neighbor’s house and access to his neighbor’s wife’s womb.

David Clines: Some have seen in the term “grind” a sexual connotation, but this is **unlikely** without an emendation of the text. The fact that a woman slave would very

likely also be used as a concubine of her master (so, e.g., **Davidson**) does not mean that such is the connotation of the term. . . The second half of the verse envisages a savage fate for his wife: it is not that she is to become the wife or even the concubine (secondary wife) of another, but that she is to be a **prostitute**, with other men, in the plural, bending over her (the term is as explicit and coarse in Hebrew as it in English). Commentators are united in shutting their eyes to this inescapable meaning of the plural verb (Job is assuredly not contemplating a string of serial marriages for her).

5. (:13-15) Oppression -- Mistreatment of Servants

*“If I have despised the claim of my male or female slaves
When they filed a complaint against me,
14 What then could I do when God arises,
And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?
15 Did not He who made me in the womb make him,
And the same one fashion us in the womb?”*

Francis Andersen: Oppression -- This section embodies a humane ethic unmatched in the ancient world. Job lived in a society of slaves and owners (**1:3**), as everywhere in the ancient East. But in his valuation a slave is not a chattel, but a human person with rights at law, rights guaranteed by God himself, their specially active Defender. **Verse 13** shows that Job believed that a slave had the right to initiate a suit against his master.

Tremper Longman: Job now declares his innocence in his dealings with his slaves and maidservants. The tremendous disparity in power between a master and a slave or servant is such that it is easy for masters to abuse those working for them. Job states that he was just in his dealings with his slaves and took seriously any charges that they made against him. He sees here an **analogy with his relationship with God**. God is like the master, and Job is like the slave. If he was not good to his slaves, what grounds would he have against God? Indeed, Job finds himself in such a position. He believes that God is unjustly abusing him. But his argument still stands. If he had not been fair, then he would have no ground for his present course, which is to bring his accusations against God. Job knows that God is a special protector of the socially vulnerable, so if Job were unfair, then God would call Job to account. Job, like the sages in Proverbs, knew that though there was a social hierarchy between masters and slaves, before God they were equal, since God made them both (**Prov. 22:2** NLT: “*The rich and poor have this in common: The Lord made them both*”; see also **14:31; 17:5; 29:13**).

John Hartley: Besides having to give an account of his actions to God, Job bases his compassionate concern for each of his servants as a person in his conviction that God has made both himself and his servant in the same way. Both were made (*‘asa*) or fashioned (*konen*), each in his mother’s womb, by the same God. The word fashion suggests the arrangement of the parts of the body into an intricate structure. Earlier Job had marveled at the conception and birth of a child (**10:10-11**). The wondrous origin of a human life is true for both slave and free, although their earthly status differs markedly. From God’s perspective the slave possesses value as well as the nobleman. Therefore what God has made with such careful skill must be treated with respect.

David Clines: Job must be claiming that he goes far beyond his obligations in admitting that slaves have rights at all, in allowing them to question the justice of how they are treated, in regarding male and female slaves as equally entitled to pursuing a grievance against their master, in believing that God might take him to task for not giving them rights, and in founding his conception of their rights upon his common humanity with them. Job's attitude certainly outstrips the norms of his day (**Peake**: "a most remarkable advance on the ethics of antiquity"), and contains at least the seeds of a very revolutionary social order.

6. (:16-23) Neglect for the Needy

Francis Andersen: The care of widows, orphans and other destitute, defenseless people was one of the most sacred obligations in Israel, near God's heart. Here Job had been most assiduous, generous with alms of food (**17**) and clothing (**19, 20**), kept alert by his wholesome fear of God (**23**).

a. (:16-18) General Summary Regarding the Poor, Widows and Orphans

*"If I have kept the poor from their desire,
Or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
17 Or have eaten my morsel alone,
And the orphan has not shared it
18 (But from my youth he grew up with me as with a father,
And from infancy I guided her),"*

Cf. James 1: 27

b. (:19-20) Failure to Clothe the Poor

*"If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
Or that the needy had no covering,
20 If his loins have not thanked me,
And if he has not been warmed with the fleece of my sheep,"*

c. (:21-23) Abuse of Orphans

*"If I have lifted up my hand against the orphan,
Because I saw I had support in the gate,
22 Let my shoulder fall from the socket,
And my arm be broken off at the elbow.
23 For calamity from God is a terror to me,
And because of His majesty I can do nothing."*

Tremper Longman: Job guarantees his helpful treatment of the weak with a self-malediction. If he is lying and did not care for them, then he asks that his shoulder blade break off his body (v. **22**). The motivation for his behavior was fear of punishment from God (v. **23**).

John Hartley: A profound awareness of God's majestic holiness guides a person to pursue righteousness and to shun evil. A person who believes this acts in all matters as though he is directly accountable to God. If he had denied helping the unfortunate, Job knows that he could not *endure God's majesty*. In God's presence he would be condemned.

7. (:24-28) Idolatry

a. (:24-25) Greed – Trust in Wealth

*“If I have put my confidence in gold,
And called fine gold my trust,
25 If I have gloated because my wealth was great,
And because my hand had secured so much;”*

Elmer Smick: vv. 24-28 -- Job begins again with another firm denial of **idolatry**. But here the temptations are different. Instead of the appeal of the ever-popular sex goddess, it is the appeal of gold (vv.24–25) and the apparent luster of two of the most commonly worshiped astral deities, the sun and moon (v.26). Job denies even secret homage to them (v.27; see also 2Ki 23:5, 11 and Eze 8:16 for a criticism of solar and lunar worship).

Tremper Longman: I have not made gold my god. Job also **put God first**. He did not defraud God by trusting in wealth (vv. 24–25) or in the heavens (vv. 26–27). Job had considerable wealth at the beginning of the story (1:3), but he did not depend on his wealth, and he remained steadfast in his commitment to Yahweh. He also rejected any temptation to worship the sun or the moon, the two major astral deities of the ancient Near East.

b. (:26-28) Worship of Heavenly Bodies

*“If I have looked at the sun when it shone,
Or the moon going in splendor,
27 And my heart became secretly enticed,
And my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,
28 That too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment,
For I would have denied God above.”*

8. (:29-30) Vindictiveness -- Satisfaction at the Misfortune of an Enemy

*“Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy,
Or exulted when evil befell him?
30 No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin
By asking for his life in a curse.”*

Francis Andersen: Job is amazingly confident. It is impossible for even the most spiritual to avoid a momentary surge of pleasure at the ruin of an enemy, sanctified by gratitude to God for his justice. Though at once suppressed, its poison is always there. A person who attains the standards of Jesus (**Matt. 5:43–48**) has to be as perfect as God. Not even in his heart did Job wish the most wicked men harm. To claim this is a

most daring invitation for God to search him to the depths for wicked ways (Ps.139:23f.). Here then is either a very clean conscience or a very calloused one.

9. (:31-32) Withholding Hospitality

*"Have the men of my tent not said,
'Who can find one who has not been satisfied with his meat ' ?
32 The alien has not lodged outside,
For I have opened my doors to the traveler."*

10. (:33-34) Hypocrisy -- Concealment of Sin

*"Have I covered my transgressions like Adam,
By hiding my iniquity in my bosom,
34 Because I feared the great multitude,
And the contempt of families terrified me,
And kept silent and did not go out of doors?"*

John Hartley: If Job had concealed his iniquity, he would have been acting out of fear of public opinion. Even more terrifying was the *contempt* that his *own clan* would express to him. If he had done wrong, the clan might have ostracized him, forcing him to live like a vagabond. No wonder a person in those days kept silent about his transgressions. But because he never transgressed God's law, Job had no need of concealing any deed. He never worried about the shame of exposure. It is this high commitment to personal integrity that motivates Job to swear this oath of innocence in order hopefully to win a public vindication from God.

II. (:35-37) CONFIDENCE IN INNOCENCE DEMANDS A DIVINE HEARING AND RESPONSE

Francis Andersen: The placement of the central idea away from the end (**verses 35–37**) so that the last lines (**38–40**) are not the climax, but an echo of a point made earlier in the poem, is a common device.

Elmer Smick: Even though this is a **poetic statement** and should not be interpreted as though it were a **legal brief**, Job adds his signature as a gesture to show his intentions to make it an official disclaimer of any indictment brought against him (**v.35**). . .

Job strategically brings his oration to its climax with a sudden change in tone. In **13:14–16** he was not so certain about his innocence and thought he might even put his life in jeopardy by calling for a hearing. But even then he affirmed that "*no godless man would dare come before him [God]!*" Now he is sure of his innocence, so **confident** of the truthfulness of these oaths that he affixes his signature and presents them as his defense with a challenge to God for a corresponding written indictment.

How does this **brash attitude** (**vv.36–37**) toward his "accuser" fit the statements accompanying the oaths about Job's fear of God's terror? This strange paradox in Job's

mind that God, to whom he appeals for support, is also his adversary is the main point of the chapter. Fearing the terror of God (v.23) is meant for those who break covenant with him. Job knows he has not done this. But he cannot deny the existential reality that he stands outside the sphere of covenantal blessing. **Something is wrong.**

There is only one way Job knows to make this absurd situation intelligible. That is to appeal to his just and sovereign Lord as a vassal prince who has been **falsely accused**. Even though he has repeated it often, he obstinately refuses to accept as final that God is his enemy.

There is always a place in the lament rhetoric of the OT for the sufferer to remind God of his justice and covenantal love. But Job is not just reminding God. He wants God to reply to his defense with a list of the charges against him so whatever doubts are left might be publicly answered.

A. (:35a) Demanding a Response from God

1. Calling for a Hearing

“Oh that I had one to hear me!”

Tremper Longman: At this point (v. 35), Job **interrupts** his **protest of innocence** in order to proclaim his desire to **meet with Shaddai**. It is appropriate that this interruption comes at this moment, since he is denying that he is a secret sinner. His denial before a human audience reminds him that he needs to issue a denial in an audience with God. Up to this point, Job has been conflicted in his desire to meet with God. Previously, he has stated the wish to see God and set him straight, but often he has been skeptical whether he would receive a proper hearing. At times, he also has expressed the wish that he had an intermediary to help him in his relationship with God (9:32–35; 16:19–22). But now, near the very end of his words, he imagines himself confidently walking into the presence of God and successfully making his case before him. As **Johnson** puts it, “This new Job is no longer a defeated man longing for the grave, he is a man who has parried the friends, been emboldened by a revelation of cosmic wisdom and is now ready to speak directly with God.”[690] Job will get his wish of an audience with God, but it will not go quite the way he anticipates here (see 38:1).

2. Confirming His Testimony

“Behold, here is my signature;”

David Guzik: The **finality** of his words are demonstrated by the phrase, “*Here is my mark.*” “Job’s statement means literally, ‘*Here is my taw.*’ Some versions translate this, ‘*Here is my signature,*’ since *taw*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, could be used like our letter ‘X’ to denote a person’s ‘mark’ or ‘signature.’ Yet even more interesting is the fact that in the ancient Hebrew script used by the author of Job, this letter *taw* was a cross-shaped mark. In a sense, therefore, what Job was saying is, ‘Here is my cross.’” (**Mason**)

3. Calling for a Response

“Let the Almighty answer me!”

B. (:35b-36a) Transparency and Boldness before the Community

*“And the indictment which my adversary has written,
36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
I would bind it to myself like a crown.”*

C. (:37) Transparency and Boldness in Approaching God

*“I would declare to Him the number of my steps;
Like a prince I would approach Him.”*

III. (:38-40a) POSTSCRIPT – FINAL SIN OF ABUSE OF THE LAND

*“If my land cries out against me,
And its furrows weep together;
39 If I have eaten its fruit without money,
Or have caused its owners to lose their lives,
40 Let briars grow instead of wheat,
And stinkweed instead of barley.”*

David Clines: The final sphere in which Job asserts his innocence is that of the land. It is not entirely clear what the crimes he might have committed could be. They might be crimes against former owners of the land, or against those who work on it now, or they could be crimes against the land itself.

Tremper Longman: Job then **returns** to his protest of innocence, his long conditional sentence that has not yet reached the apodosis. He has denied taking pleasure in the demise of his personal enemies. He has never denied hospitality even to a stranger. He has never concealed a sin from the public. Finally, he **denies that he has sinned against the land** by eating its produce without paying. Job then says that if he has done any of these things, then instead of edible and productive foods like wheat and barley, may his land produce bramble and stinkweed.

Francis Andersen: The concluding paragraph deals with the **responsible use of land**. . . The land is personified as the chief witness of the crimes committed on it, such as eating the produce without payment (more likely to be the wages of reapers, or the share of tenants, than purchase from owners), or illegal seizure (**1 Kgs 21**). Job is prepared to accept the primeval curses on Adam (**Gen. 3:17**) and Cain (**Gen. 4:11**). As in **verse 8**, poetic justice would then be done, and seen.

Derek Kidner: One final denial comes from Job: he has not been guilty of any abuse of his land. The law made specific demands on landowners: the land was not to be sown with two kinds of seed (**Leviticus 19:19**), it was to receive a rest every seventh year (**Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:2-7; 26:34-35**), and in particular, no blood was to be shed on it, for if it was, the land would cry out for vengeance – as the death of Abel

highlighted (**Genesis 4:10-12**; cf. **Numbers 35:33-34**). Job has not been guilty of abusing these laws: he has not eaten its produce without paying fair wages to those hired to perform the labour involved (**31:39**). As a businessman, Job pleads his innocence. At work, as well as at home, Job has demonstrated the faith which he professes. If he has not, he is prepared for the curse pronounced in Eden to fall upon his land (**31:40**; cf. **Genesis 3:17-18**).

(:40b) EPILOGUE – CASE CLOSED

“The words of Job are ended.”

John Hartley: At the conclusion of this speech is a note that Job’s words are ended. He rests his case. He will not even lament any more. He will wait for god to answer his oath, hopeful of being declared innocent. The next chapter will open a new section. This line is probably an editorial comment like that found in **Jer. 51:64** and **Ps. 72:20**.

Bullinger: This is not a mere epigraph of a writer, or editor. They are the concluding words which Job uttered: by which he informed his friends that he did not intend to carry the controversy any further; but that he had now said all he meant to say. So far as he was concerned, the controversy was ended.

Warren Wiersbe: When the words of Job were ended, everybody sat in silence, wondering what would happen next. Would God send immediate judgment and prove Job guilty? Or would He accept Job’s challenge, appear to him, and give Job opportunity to defend himself? Perhaps God would speak from heaven and answer Job’s questions.

Job had challenged God because he was sure God would vindicate him. Job’s three friends were sure that God would condemn him.

What will God do? The answer may surprise you!

Roy Zuck: With this oath of innocence, in which Job denied almost a dozen sins of action or attitude, he rested his case. Ending his arguments against the belligerent team of tyrants, he hoped to force God to move. He apparently felt that such an ultimatum would make God break His silence. If Job were innocent, then God would be required, according to legal practice, to speak up and affirm it. If Job were guilty, then God would be expected to bring down the imprecations on him. But, as Job round out, God still remained silent. The sovereign God cannot be pushed into a corner, or pressured into action by anyone’s demand.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you protect against the intensified temptation of lust in our contemporary culture with its widespread availability of pornographic material and graphic imagery?
- 2) What similarities do you see in the sins addressed by Job and the approach taken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount?
- 3) How do you counter the charge of some that Job is protesting his innocence too strongly here and not being honest about his failure to perfectly keep God's laws?
- 4) In what way does Job try to force God's hand to respond to his predicament and perplexity?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Atkinson: These powerful chapters of Job's pilgrimage not only give us a deep insight into the **psychology of grief**; they open up for us a **pilgrimage of faith** which is marked more than anything else by Job's **integrity**. We may feel he indulges at times in self-pity. We may feel he becomes too self-assertive in places. But we cannot mistake his integrity. These chapters tell us that good and innocent people do suffer in this world. They tell us that the way Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar pressed the logic of the doctrine of rewards, so as to make it a matter of simple cause and effect, grievously misses the mark. They show us the misery caused by **inappropriate pastoral application** even of the truth. These chapters tell us that the people God has made have a rightful place in the Creator's purposes, and that if God is a God of power and of goodness, then surely communion between human beings and God is possible. That is the hope. They give us a glimpse of life beyond Sheol, and a hint that Job is beginning to realize that there is more to his story than meets the eye. For as we know, he is the Lord's servant, and as we also know, it is through the suffering of the servant of God that God's purposes of grace are achieved.

Tremper Longman: Godly people do not receive all the blessings of the godly, and wicked people do not receive all the punishment that their sins and crimes deserve. Even so, the lament psalms that protest innocence demonstrate that we can call on God to set things right. We can and should protest to God, even though we believe that true retribution will happen not in this life but in the life to come.

Job's protest, though, has grown increasingly impatient, questioning God's justice. Soon he will meet God, though rather than him setting God straight, God will set Job straight.

John Hartley: Job's last speech is a masterpiece. He recounts his former honor (**ch. 29**), mourns his humiliation (**ch. 30**), and then swears an oath of innocence (**ch. 31**). His

confidence has grown so strong that he enumerates specific sins that he has not done, under threat of a terrible curse should he be lying. He has lived by the highest moral standard, concerned not only with his acts but more importantly with his attitudes and motives. Job has had regard for the dignity of all people, be they nobles, servants, or foreigners, and his affection for God survives underneath his complaints.

The clarity of Job's conviction reveals that he has risen above his deep despair as expressed in his curse-lament (**ch. 3**). Even though his pain has not lessened, he has been able to give form to his thoughts. By verbally lamenting his bitterest feelings, he has not let the bitterness and anger of his sorrow drive him to utter despair. He gives focus to his frustration by addressing God as his opponent. Complaining to God about his wretched condition keeps him from falling into subjective disorientation. Although frustrated at God's apparent hostility, Job has, throughout the dialogue, kept a high view of God in his thinking by reciting hymnic lines in praise of God. Now he rests his case with God, believing that in the end God will do justice by him.

In these chapters Job is a model of how the human spirit can struggle against all aspects of suffering – physical, emotional, social, spiritual – and sustain a search for God while God remains hidden. The ability to express genuine faith under extreme duress enables the human spirit to bear the severest tragedy and prevail. Job disciplines his thoughts and his emotions as he demands an answer from God. Since God is the supreme ruler, Job has nowhere to turn but to God, with the hope that God will answer him. If God does answer him, his experience will prove that every misfortune can have a redemptive outcome. To cope with a hard, trying experience, the afflicted must keep his focus on God in order not to compromise his confidence in God. Such persistent faith will strengthen the bond between God and the afflicted. Evil will never triumph over a person who trusts in God. Job will find justification. In this speech the bifocal image of the patient Job of the prologue and the agitated Job of the dialogue comes into clear focus the persevering Job. Assuredly Job demonstrates that God's confidence in him has been well-founded, for his most basic motivation for serving God, the very motivation that urges him to persevere, is his longing for the dynamic communion he finds in God's presence.

David Thompson: Keep in mind Job has no one functioning as his defense attorney. No one is defending his character or godliness so Job had to represent himself because no one else would do it. What he says here is the truth and it is right.

JOB HAD DONE NOTHING IMMORAL OR EVIL TO DESERVE ALL OF THE TERRIBLE THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM, AND HE IS PREPARED TO PERSONALLY FACE GOD'S JUDGMENT AND PUNISHMENTS IF HE HAD.

Here is a real man of real **integrity**. He had a real righteousness and it is no wonder that God classified him as the most righteous man on this earth. In fact, God said "*there is no one like him on the earth*" (**1:8**). Job was willing to go into God's court and receive God's judgment. He had not done the kinds of evil things that can bring the judgment of God.

Practical Applications:

1. One who is right with God does not cover sin; he faces it and confesses it.
2. One right with God knows whether or not he has done something to deserve the judgment of God.
3. One right with God is not afraid to face the honest judgment of God with all of its negative ramifications because he knows he is right with God.
4. When one right with God is hit with satanic adversity, many will forget about all the righteous positives and will falsely accuse and slander.
5. When one right with God is hit with satanic adversity, many will abandon you and you will feel all alone.
6. It is not wrong for one to state truth and facts and defend himself before others and before God.

TEXT: Job 32:1-22

TITLE: ELIHU'S INTRODUCTION – IMPASSIONED AND IMPELLED TO SPEAK

BIG IDEA:

**THE BURDEN FOR IMPARTING WISDOM FALLS ON THOSE TRULY
INSPIRED BY GOD REGARDLESS OF AGE OR EXPERIENCE**

INTRODUCTION:

John Hartley: Job's avowal of innocence is so audacious and final that it leaves the comforters speechless. All are terrified, waiting for an answer from the heavens. But God remains silent. Then a young man named Elihu arises. Taking advantage of the silence, he asks for permission to address Job. Possessed by a compelling need to defend God's honor, he is convinced that he can instruct Job even though the others have failed. Who should change the mood but the youthful, bombastic Elihu. What a surprise! Elihu's verbose, overly apologetic style offers comic relief to break the tight, fearful atmosphere created by Job's oath. . .

After a lengthy apology for speaking, Elihu delivers four unanswered discourses. His thesis is twofold: God disciplines a person to turn him from the error of his way, and God governs justly without exception. Although Elihu's approach is close to that of the three friends, he differs from them in that he does not assume that all suffering is punishment for past sins. He teaches that misfortune may befall a person in order to awaken him to some wrongful attitude or unconscious error and thus keep him from taking a wrong course. Another major difference in his teaching is the emphasis that suffering may be an expression of God's mercy more than his wrath. With these theses Elihu makes a significant contribution to the core issue of the book, namely, how the righteous should respond to suffering.

Furthermore, the Elihu speeches stress God's sovereignty. If God had spoken immediately after Job's oath, it would appear that Job's oath had compelled him to answer. That God remains silent indicates that his coming appearance rests in his sovereign decision. God always keeps the initiative with himself.

Francis Andersen: **Elihu's first speech (32:6–33:33).** This is quite a rigmarole. The speech proper does not begin until **33:1**, where Job is addressed by name. The rest of chapter 32 (**verses 6–22**) is Elihu's **self-introduction and apologia for intervening**. He is very wordy. When he finally attempts to refute Job point by point (**33:8–28**), his remarks are framed by opening (**33:1–7**) and closing (**33:29–33**) exhortations directed to Job personally.

Derek Kidner: Many critics are not kind to Elihu. They see him as an egocentric, brash young man, full of himself and with nothing of any relevance to say. True, he is young, confident, inexperience, talkative and obviously angry, but none of these precludes him

from making a contribution. Elihu is bold enough to challenge the received wisdom of the day and perhaps it takes someone of his temperament to do that. After all, the received wisdom of the day would have Elihu say nothing at all!

Warren Wiersbe: While Elihu said some of the same things as the other speakers, his purpose was different from theirs. He was not trying to prove that Job was a sinner, but that Job's view of God was wrong. Elihu introduced a new truth into the debate: that God sends suffering, not necessarily to punish us for our sins, but to keep us from sinning (**33:18, 24**) and to make us better persons (**36:1-15**). Paul would have agreed with the first point (**2 Cor. 12:7-10**) and the writer of Hebrews with the second (**Heb. 12:1-11**).

Elmer Smick: Despite his anger (**32:2-3**) and wordy lecturing style, Elihu never gets bitter as did Bildad and Zophar. Nor does he stoop to false accusation about Job's earlier life (cf. Eliphaz, **22:4-11**). He presents God as a merciful teacher (**33:23-28; 36:22-26**). Suffering is disciplinary (**33:19-22**), not just judgmental. The counselors glorified God with their hymns but remained cold and detached. Elihu has a warmer personal response to the greatness of God (**37:1-2**). He includes himself as one who should be hushed in awe before God. Elihu says God reveals both his justice and his covenantal love in his sovereign control of the world (**37:13, 23**); this is the reason the wise of heart should worship him. That is a fitting note of introduction for Yahweh's appearance.

I. (:1-5) IMPASSIONED BY ANGER AND IMPATIENT TO SPEAK

Tremper Longman: Elihu's speech, which like the preceding debate between Job and his friends is in poetic format, is prefaced by a **prose introduction** (**32:1-5**). Though the three friends stopped talking several chapters ago, we learn for the first time why. They grew silent because Job thought he was right. They were unable to convince him of his culpability.

Elmer Smick: Job closed his peroration with a final flourish of bravado. He was so certain of his blameless life that he would be willing to march like a prince into the presence of God and give an account of his every step. The attempts of his friends to convince him of his sinfulness have failed. Job could have no more to say, having challenged God. The friends have no more to say because they consider him a hopeless hypocrite (**v.1; 22:4-5**).

The book at this point introduces Elihu, a young man who in deference to age has waited with increasing impatience for the opportunity to speak (**vv.2-4**). Four times in the Hebrew text we are told he is angry. First at Job (**v.2** [2x]) for justifying himself rather than God and then at the friends because of their inability to refute Job (**v.3**; cf. **v.5**).

David Clines: The primary function of these verses is to explain the intrusion of a new speaker into the dialogue. Elihu's intervention is accounted for as irresistible: he has listened to the speeches both of Job and of the friends with mounting anger, and he is unable to contain himself any longer. Without question, this introduction of a new character into the book gives the narrative an unexpected dramatic twist, for which the reader has been wholly unprepared.

A. (:1) Occasion for the Display of Elihu's Anger

*"Then these three men ceased answering Job,
because he was righteous in his own eyes."*

B. (:2-3) Objects of Elihu's Anger

1. (:2) Anger against Job

*"But the anger of Elihu
the son of Barachel the Buzite,
of the family of Ram burned;
against Job his anger burned,
because he justified himself before God."*

Thomas Constable: Elihu ("*He is My God*") may have been a relative of Abraham, since a man named Buz was a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother (**Gen. 22:20-21**), and Elihu was a Buzite (cf. **Jer. 25:23**). A man named Ram (**v. 2**) was an ancestor of David (**Ruth 4:19-22**). **Delitzsch** believed that Elihu was an Aramean Arab. **Clines** favored his being an Edomite. Elihu is the only friend of Job's whose family lineage is given, suggesting that he was important for some reason. The name of Elihu's father Barachel means "*God Blesses*" or "*May God Bless*."

David Thompson: Elihu is angry with Job because he believes that Job has actually elevated himself or put himself above God. This is what made him mad. Elihu was not mad at Job's defense, he was mad because he saw in his defense an elevation of himself in a way that de-elevated God.

David Clines: If there is any significance in the **names** themselves, it may be that Elihu, "*he is God*," could suggest that this speaker will be the one who best upholds the divine honor, the wisdom equivalent perhaps of his near prophetic namesake Elijah, "*Yahweh is God*." His father's name Barachel may suggest "*God blesses*" or "*may God bless!*" perhaps an implicit denial of the cruel and unjust character of the God whom Job has been depicting. His clan name Ram suggests "*high*," perhaps meaning that Elihu's high birth entitles him to speak despite his youth. But his place Buz can only suggest "*disgrace*" or "*despising*" (cf. the verb "*despise*"), and it would be straining things to see in that a sign of the apparently unimpressive arguments of a young man. In fact, the "meanings" conjured up by all the proper names are of such generality that it is hard to think that they have been chosen designedly (against **Fohrer**).

2. (:3) Anger against Job's Three Counsellors

*"And his anger burned against his three friends
because they had found no answer,
and yet had condemned Job."*

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

David Thompson: Elihu was really angry with Job's supposed three friends. They had pointed their fingers at Job without any proof or evidence. They had verbally ripped him to shreds and condemned him, yet they could not offer one shred of true evidence and Elihu was hot that they had done this.

Derek Kidner: Elihu is also angry with Job's three counsellors. He is angry with them because they have singularly failed in convincing Job that God was not in the wrong. They have, by now, fallen silent, partly because they are disgusted that Job seems to be justifying himself (**32:1**), and partly because there is no more to be said. It is interesting to note that they are no longer called "*friends*" (as in **2:11; 19:21; 42:10**), but "*three men*" (**32:1**). None of them has answered Job's fundamental question as to why he was suffering. All three, in varying degrees, have been intent on finding the reason for Job's suffering in his sinful rebellion towards God. The remedy, as far as they are concerned, lies in Job's immediate repentance.

David Clines: By failing to refute Job's claims to innocence and by failing to show that he has in fact been a sinner, they give the impression (however unintentionally) that Job is in the right and that therefore God, his opponent, is in the wrong.

C. (:4) Outburst of Elihu's Anger (Impatient to speak after pent up containment)

*"Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job
because they were years older than he."*

Elmer Smick: **Verses 4–5** reveal clearly that Elihu's major target is Job. He "*waited before speaking to Job*." Elihu's reply to the counselors is secondary, as is evident in his speeches.

D. (:5) Origin and Obsession of Elihu's Anger

*"And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men
his anger burned."*

John Hartley: His anger, however, had been slowly simmering. Since it has now reached the boiling point, Elihu feels that he must vent it by speaking.

II. (:6-22) IMPELLED TO SPEAK – 4 MOTIVATIONS

A. (:6-10) Impelled to Speak Due to the Possession of Wisdom -- Older Doesn't Necessarily Mean Wiser – Inspiration from God is Key

1. (:6-7) Initial Deference Given to the Older Counsellors

*“So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said,
‘I am young in years and you are old;
Therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think.
7 I thought age should speak,
And increased years should teach wisdom.’”*

John MacArthur: Elihu may have called his words “*what I think*” (vv. 6, 10, 17), but he claimed it had come by inspiration from God (v. 8; cf. 33:6, 33).

Albert Barnes: The whole of the discourses of the friends of Job seem to imply that they were aged men. They laid claim to great experience, and professed to have had opportunities of long observation, and it is probable that they were regarded as sages, who, by the long observation of events, had acquired the reputation of great wisdom.

2. (:8) Inspiration from God is the Key Qualifier for Wisdom

*“But it is a spirit in man,
And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.”*

Poole: So the sense of the place is, Every man, as a man, whether old or young, hath a reasonable soul, by which he is able in some measure to discern between good and evil, and to judge of men's opinions and discourses; and therefore I also may venture to deliver my opinion.

David Thompson: It was now time for Elihu to speak and there are three reasons why:

- 1) Wisdom is in a man, not in age (32:8a);
- 2) Wisdom comes from God, regardless of age (32:8b) and
- 3) Older people may not have a grasp of God's wisdom (32:9).

John Hartley: The spirit in a human being is an essential source of insight, for it searches one's deepest thinking (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16). It is the seat of a person's reflective thought. The spirit enables one to evaluate ideas and actions and to discern attitudes. Moreover, the Spirit of God may endow the spirit of a particular human being with a special wisdom, e.g., skill in artisan's work (Exod. 31:2-5; 35:30 – 36:1) or the art of administering justly and with the fear of the Lord (cf. Isa. 11:2-4). Thus Elihu seems to be asserting that having been inspired by the Spirit of God (cf. 1 K. 3:9, 12; 5:9 [Eng. 4:29]) he has insight that may be trusted despite his youth. No wonder he will go on to argue in a few verses that he can no longer restrain his own spirit from speaking (vv. 18-20).

Albert Barnes: He now finds that wisdom is not the attribute of rank or station, but that it is the gift of God, and therefore it may be found in a youth. All true wisdom, is the sentiment, is from above; and where the inspiration of the Almighty is, no matter

whether with the aged or the young, there is understanding. Elihu undoubtedly means to say, that though he was much younger than they were, and though, according to the common estimate in which the aged and the young were held, he might be supposed to have much less acquaintance with the subjects under consideration, yet, as all true wisdom came from above, he might be qualified to speak. The word “*spirit*” here, therefore, refers to the spirit which God gives. . .

3. (:9) Inability of Age to Guarantee Wisdom

*“The abundant in years may not be wise,
Nor may elders understand justice.”*

4. (:10) Introduction of New Counsel that Merits a Hearing

*“So I say, ‘Listen to me,
I too will tell what I think.’”*

B. (:11-14) Impelled to Speak Due to the Inadequacy of Earlier Arguments – Elihu Could Make a Better Case

1. (:11-12) Earlier Arguments Failed to Refute Job

*“Behold, I waited for your words,
I listened to your reasonings,
While you pondered what to say.
12 I even paid close attention to you,
Indeed, there was no one who refuted Job,
Not one of you who answered his words.”*

David Clines: vv. 11-14 -- Elihu’s first motivation for intervening in the debate was that he felt he had something of his own to say despite his comparative youth (vv 6–10). His second reason, in these verses, is that the three friends have in his eyes failed to confute Job and his position. He agrees essentially with the views of the friends and is angry with them only because they have not succeeded against Job; their cause is better than their advocacy of it (**Davidson**).

2. (:13-14) Elihu Not Defeated Because He Offers New Arguments

*“Do not say, ‘We have found wisdom;
God will rout him, not man.’
14 For he has not arranged his words against me;
Nor will I reply to him with your arguments.”*

John MacArthur: Job had complained that God did not speak to him. Elihu reminded Job that God didn’t have to defend His will and actions to anyone.

C. (:15-20) Impelled to Speak Due to His Pent Up Words

1. (:15-17) The Other Counsellors Are Out of Words

*“They are dismayed,
they answer no more;
Words have failed them.*

*16 And shall I wait, because they do not speak,
Because they stop and answer no more?
17 I too will answer my share,
I also will tell my opinion.”*

2. (:18-20) Elihu is Full of Words and Bursting at the Seams to Speak

*“For I am full of words;
The spirit within me constrains me.
19 Behold, my belly is like unvented wine,
Like new wineskins it is about to burst.
20 Let me speak that I may get relief;
Let me open my lips and answer.”*

D. (:21-22) Impelled to Speak Due to His Impartiality and Objectivity

*“Let me now be partial to no one;
Nor flatter any man.
22 For I do not know how to flatter,
Else my Maker would soon take me away.”*

Roy Zuck: Elihu felt compelled to speak, to reply to the three and to Job. Yet in his responses he would not take sides (he disagreed with both sides) nor would he *flatter* either party in an effort to win its favor. He said that to be guilty of *flattery*, an unfair tactic, would mean God, who gave him life (*my Maker*; cf. **4:17; 9:9; 35:10; 36:3; 40:19**), would *take it away*.

John Hartley: Elihu affirms emphatically that he will speak the truth without being *partial* or showing favoritism to anyone. On the one hand, in his apology Elihu argues that in wisdom he is on a par with his elders. On the other hand, he is saying that he will not cloud the issue with the use of titles or with flattery (*kinna*, **vv. 21b** and **22a**). The use of titles is proper, unless intended to influence a person to a favorable bearing; then their use is a kind of bribery. Elihu, though, will speak his convictions plainly and boldly regardless of how his words might offend either Job or the comforters. In fact, he declares *I do not know how to flatter*. He believes that accommodating himself to others would prompt God, his *Maker*, to carry him away, possibly by a storm (cf. **27:21**). He thus claims unwavering allegiance to God, an allegiance that will not be altered by the prestige or persuasion of anybody.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) To what extent should we give deference to age and experience in providing helpful counsel?
- 2) How does God impart wisdom and discernment and understanding today?

3) Why did Elihu consider that he had something valuable to offer in this discussion?

4) Do we keep quiet when we should and do we speak up when we should?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tremper Longman: The bulk of Elihu's speech simply parrots what the three friends have said before. The absence of a response thus should be understood as a lack of interest. Elihu says nothing new and therefore can safely be ignored.

If this is correct, then **what function does this speech serve?** The retribution theology of the three friends has already been shown inadequate. Why have a fourth voice join the chorus and devote six whole chapters to him? What makes Elihu unique is not the content of his argument, but the **ground of his argument**. Right at the start, he distances himself from the friends, who 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.

David Atkinson: These chapters look like an interruption. But whatever the outcome of the scholarly debate about their integrity within the book, they certainly serve in the edition in our Bibles as another **breathing space** between the final stand of Job in declaring his innocence, and the word of Yahweh spoken out of the whirlwind in chapter.

As we have already said, we need that breathing space. The artistic skill of the author of these chapters in **sustaining the tension** in Job, and also in preparing us carefully for the final word from the Lord, is unsurpassed. . .

The question still remains, however, as to why it is important to the author to have the Elihu speeches here at all. We have heard Job's passionate last stand. We are waiting for the Lord. How does Elihu serve to bring us from one to the other? Like **chapter 28**, Elihu opens up the **theme of wisdom**, which is a **theological bridge** in the story between Job's experience and his hearing the Lord. This will prove to be the **theological significance** of Elihu. But there is perhaps a **dramatic purpose** as well. These chapters give us a space between Job and Yahweh. They illustrate, just by being there, that Yahweh is not forced into a quick reply by the intensity of Job's entreaties. God acts in his own time, he is not at human beck and call. He 'comes down his own secret stair', and in sovereign and gracious care, he decides the timing of his interventions. Elihu gives us this place to pause, and so serves the author's purpose of displaying the freedom of God. Elihu blusters away, he makes his own mistakes. But in the middle of his blusterings, there are some **gems**, and it is these gems which are part of the preparation Job needs – and we the readers need – **to be ready to hear the Lord**.

Baxter: Elihu's discourse, which fills no less than six chapters, has been criticized as verbose and as the speech of a conceited young man, disrespectful in its tone and adding nothing to the argument. A more careful reading refutes this unkindly misjudgment. It is the most courteous speech of the debate, and undoubtedly surpasses all the preceding speeches in spiritual grasp. It moves on a higher level than the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. What is most of all important, however, in relation to the problem under discussion, is that it introduces three new factors. First, there is a new **approach**. Second, there is a new **answer**. Third, there is a new **appeal**.

John Schultz: The Pulpit Commentary comments on the appearance of Elihu: “A new speaker now appears upon the scene. Elihu, a comparatively young man, who has been present at all the colloquies, and heard all the arguments, dissatisfied alike with the discourses of Job and with the replies made to them by his ‘*comforters*’ (... **Job 32:2, 3**), interposes with a long harangue (... **Job 32:6 - 37.**), addressed partly to the ‘*comforters*’ (... **Job 32:6-22**), but mainly to Job himself (**Job 33, 35-37**), and having for its object to shame the ‘*comforters*,’ to rebuke Job, and to vindicate God’s ways from the misrepresentations of both parties to the controversy. The speech is that of a somewhat arrogant and conceited young man. It exaggerates Job’s faults of temper and language, and consequently censures him unduly; but it adds one important element to the controversy by its insistence on the view that calamities are sent by God, for the most part, as chastisements, not punishment, in love, not in anger, and have for their main object to warn, and teach, and restrain from evil courses, not to take vengeance on past sins. There is much that is elevating and instructive in Elihu’s arguments and reflections (... **Job 33:14-30; 34:5-11; 36:7 - 16; 37:2-13**, etc.); but the **tone** of the speech is harsh, disrespectful, and presumptuous, so that we feel no surprise at Job not condescending to answer it, but meeting it by a contemptuous silence.”

The commentary’s judgment upon Elihu sounds a little harsh and extreme. The fact that, at the end, God does not rebuke him should allow us to give him more credit than can be given to either Job himself or to his three friends.

Peter Wallace: Preaching Elihu is a real challenge – because the preacher is supposed to say, “*Thus saith the Lord!*”

Preaching Job’s friends was a bit of a challenge, because Job’s friends are sort of right – and yet God says that they are also wrong! But the solution was fairly simple: preach both the friend’s speech and Job’s response in the same sermon.

But Elihu goes on and on and on and on – for six chapters! And when God finally responds, does he actually respond to Elihu? He only speaks to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar! Elihu is never mentioned.

- Some take Elihu at his word, and they think that Elihu essentially speaks for God.
- Others think that Elihu is the mouthpiece of the author of Job.

- Others point out that Elihu is simply repeating the arguments of the friends, and that the purpose of these six chapters is to make you long for these idiots just to shut up!
- Others suggest that Elihu speaks on behalf of the Satan – the Accuser – trying to get Job to curse God and die.
- Others can't figure out what to do with Elihu, and so they suggest that Elihu was added later by someone else.
- Others can't make sense of the text the way it is written, and so they rearrange the parts of the text in order to make a story that makes sense to them!

So what do we do with Elihu?

- Sometimes Elihu quotes or paraphrases the friends – and sounds like he is just repeating their arguments.
- Sometimes Elihu quotes or paraphrases Job – and sounds like he is agreeing with Job.
- Sometimes Elihu anticipates what God is about to say – and sounds like he is preparing Job to hear God.

What sort of person mimics everyone else?

- The court jester.
- The fool. . .

When I call Elihu the jester, I am not suggesting that you can ignore what Elihu says! The court fool is rarely an idiot! He parodies the king and his courtiers – but often he reveals important truths through his foolery. . .

You really need to think of Elihu as a brilliant, but somewhat pompous young man who thinks too highly of himself, and in his attempts to show off he makes himself look a bit ridiculous sometimes.

Warren Wiersbe: Elihu emphasized that he had waited patiently before speaking, and he gave two reasons.

- For one thing, he was younger than Job and the three friends; and youth must respect age and experience (**Job 32:4, 6-7**). It would have been a terrible breach of etiquette had Elihu interrupted his elders.
- His second reason was because he wanted to hear the complete debate and have all the arguments before him (**v. 11; Prov. 28:13**). . .

Having introduced himself into the discussion, Elihu then gave four reasons to explain why it was important for him to speak and for them to listen. After all, he was a “nobody”; and he had to convince them that what he had to say was worth hearing.

- He was indignant (32:1-3, 5).
- He was inspired (32:8-10).
- He was impartial (32:1, 21-22).
- He was impelled (32:16-20).

John Hartley: Elihu delivers four unanswered speeches. The substance of each speech is as follows.

- In his first speech Elihu develops the theme that God instructs a person through dreams and afflictions. God uses these means to turn a person from wrongdoing, either potential or real, that will result in a premature death. To guarantee the release of that person from death's grip, he sends a special mediating angel to offer that person's ransom should he turn and pray for God's help (**32:6 33:33**).
- In his second speech Elihu defends the tenet that God governs the world injustice without exception (**34:1-37**).
- In the third speech Elihu reasons that human beings cannot affect God either by their sins or by their righteous acts. In no way, therefore, can God be placed under obligation as Job has attempted to do by demanding that God acknowledge his innocence (**35:1-16**).
- In his last speech Elihu returns to his opening thesis that God disciplines anyone in jeopardy, even the mightiest, with suffering. Then he prepares Job for God's appearing by contemplating the divine glory that is manifest in a thunderstorm. He concludes with the conviction that the wise are those who fear God (**36:1 – 37:24**).

David Clines: the speeches could be divided up differently on **thematic lines** (following **Terrien**):

(1) Introduction, addressed to the three friends and perhaps a wider audience (**32:6–22**);

(2) Part 1:

- God's silence not signifying his injustice (**33:1–33**),
- response to Job's attack on divine retribution (**34:1–37**), and
- Job's misjudgment about his innocence (**35:1–16**); and

(3) Part 2:

- the purpose of human suffering (**36:1–25**) and
- praise of God as sovereign of the three seasons (**36:26—37:24**), the divinely appointed means for humans to gain wisdom.

David Thompson: **Practical Applications:**

1. There can be wisdom in youth.
2. There is a place for righteous anger.
3. There can be foolishness with the elderly.
4. There are times when we need to speak up.

TEXT: Job 33:1-33

TITLE: ELIHU'S FIRST SPEECH: GOD DOES SPEAK – BUT IN UNEXPECTED WAYS

BIG IDEA:

GOD USES DREAMS, PAIN AND MEDIATION TO COMMUNICATE HOW ONE CAN AVOID THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES OF SIN AND ENJOY HIS GRACE

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Zuck: Job's Complaint: **God is silent;** He does not respond to me (**13:22**; cf. **33:13**).

David Atkinson: Elihu argues that **God knows best** – so what right has Job to complain? But there is more to it than this. One of the gems comes in **33:30**, where Elihu tells us of **God's purpose in suffering** – it is both preventive and affirmative: *'to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.'*

God allows his child to suffer *'to bring back his soul from the Pit'* (RSV) – that is, to check him when he is on the wrong path; and *'that he may see the light of life'* (RSV) – to bring him back on to the right path. In contrast to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, therefore, Elihu has a **more positive view** of suffering. He is not seeing the situation in terms of past sins and Job's need for repentance; he is open to the possibility that God is doing some positive work in Job, even though Job could not see it. God is using Job's suffering creatively.

Elmer Smick: The refutation of Job beginning in **v.8** immediately reveals Elihu's **style—direct quotation** of Job's words. In the Dialogue Job and his friends replied in a more general way to one another's ideas. Elihu is not satisfied with this. Even though he says, *"I heard the very words,"* some feel Elihu has the advantage of also seeing them. Whether that is so or not, he is concerned with the very words and quotes them fairly accurately three times (**33:9–11**; **34:5–6**; **35:2–3**) as the starting points for his rebuttal of Job's claim to innocence.

Tremper Longman: In **vv. 12–30** Elihu strongly objects to Job's putative self-righteousness. God is not unjust, but rather God is trying to teach Job a lesson through his suffering. Suffering has a **disciplinary function**. It may be, though, that Job can escape suffering through the intervention of a **mediator**, a possibility that corresponds with Job's own desire in **9:32–35** and **16:18–22**. **Chapter 33** ends (**vv. 31–33**) with yet another **appeal** that Job be quiet and listen to him. Elihu is the one who has wisdom that he intends to impart to Job.

David Clines: According to Elihu, Job's position is that

- (1) he is faultless (v 9), and that
- (2) God's afflictions of him are therefore expressions of groundless hatred and enmity (vv 10–11), and that
- (3) God refuses to answer his complaints of unjust treatment (v 13).

Any response Elihu makes to the first two points are made very indirectly; his attention is concentrated on the third issue. Even here his reply is not a direct one, for he responds to Job's complaint that God does not answer him by showing how God does indeed speak to humans generally.

Elihu's argument will be that God has **various ways of speaking to humans** (and, implicitly, that therefore it is wrong to accuse him of not responding). One such mode is the dream, when God puts warnings into human minds (vv 15–17), and another is suffering (vv 19–28), which can be accepted as sent from God to bring people to their senses, acknowledging their sin. By either means, God's **intention** is not to punish but to rescue humans from their sin.

Warren Wiersbe: This is a remarkable speech because it introduces into the debate a **new insight** into the **purpose of suffering**. Job's friends had argued that his suffering was evidence that God was punishing him for his sins, but Elihu now argues that sometimes God permits us to suffer to keep us from sin. In other words, suffering may be **preventive** and not **punitive**. God does all He can to keep us from sinning and going into the pit of death, and this is evidence of His grace (**Job 33:24**).

(:1-7) ELIHU'S PLEADING FOR A HEARING – RECEIVE MY WORDS AND RESPECT MY ARGUMENTS

A. (:1-3) Receive My Words as Sincere Wisdom

1. (:1) My Words Deserve a Hearing

*“However now, Job, please hear my speech,
And listen to all my words.”*

John Hartley: In addressing Job by name he does not use any titles, showing his disregard for the position or prestige of any person, as has just promised he would do. This form of address, however, also reflects Elihu's brash character in that he does not fear to address a distinguished elder by name.

Roy Zuck: Job had asked his three friends to listen to him (**13:6, 17; 21:2**); now Elihu turned that around and asked that Job hear *him*.

2. (:2) My Words Are Ready to Be Spoken

*“Behold now, I open my mouth,
My tongue in my mouth speaks.”*

David Clines: it is more probable that these are simply conventional lines of introduction to a speech, more in the nature of phatic communion than of actual

communication (cf., e.g., **Ps 78:2; Prov 8:6–8**). We are dealing here not with a “formal summons to appear in court for a public trial” (**Habel**) but with a rather old-fashioned rhetoric signifying a “grave and deliberate utterance” (**Cox**); for the phrase “*open the mouth*”, cf. **Isa 53:7; Pss 51:15 (17); 78:2; Job 3; 1; Dan 10:16**.

3. (:3) My Words Are Sincere

*“My words are from the uprightness of my heart;
And my lips speak knowledge sincerely.”*

David Clines: In saying that his words are *sincere*, Elihu can hardly be taking a sideswipe at Job, implying that he by contrast has spoken out of a sinful heart (as **Fohrer** suggests). It is rather that his words are neither insincerely flattering (cf. **32:21**) nor malicious. Elihu aims not at Job’s defeat (though he does want to correct him) but only at establishing the truth about the meaning of Job’s afflictions. If anything, Elihu is contrasting his intentions of honesty and sincerity with that of the three friends, whose speeches Job had found insincere and false (e.g., **6:25; 13:7–10; 16:2–5; 19:2–5; 21:27, 34**).

B. (:4-7) Respect My Arguments as Inspired and Not Intimidating

Elmer Smick: the verses form an a • b/a' • b' pattern. **Verse 4** goes with **v.6** and **v.5** with **v.7**.

1. (:4) My Arguments Are Inspired

*“The Spirit of God has made me,
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”*

John Hartley: In referring to his origin in this way Elihu claims two things:

- He is equal to both Job and the comforters,
- And his words are worthy of careful attention, for they are inspired.

2. (:5) My Arguments Must Be Addressed

*“Refute me if you can;
Array yourselves before me,
take your stand.”*

Roy Zuck: Job, he said, should prepare his response and be ready to confront Elihu as in verbal combat. The word ‘*arak*, translated “*prepare*,” means *to arrange in order*, often in the sense of marshaling military forces or weapons in battle order (cf. **1 Sam. 17:8**, “*line up for battle*,” and **Job 6:4**, “*marshaled*”; **37:19**, “*draw up*”; **13:18**, “*prepared*”; **23:4**, “*state*”). The word *yasab* here rendered “*confront*,” means to take one’s stand or position, sometimes in the sense of readiness for battle (**1 Sam. 17:16; Jer. 46:4, 14; Job 41:10**). Elihu was ready for a skirmish!

3. (:6-7) My Arguments Are Not Intended to Intimidate

“Behold, I belong to God like you;

*I too have been formed out of the clay.
Behold, no fear of me should terrify you,
Nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you.”*

Francis Andersen: In **verse 6** he assures Job that they are both on exactly the same footing, so far as God is concerned. Their common humanity is traced to **creation**.

David Clines: It is important to Elihu to establish a **commonality** with Job. In **32:8** he had used the common creation of humankind as his justification for entering the conversation. If all humans have a share in the divine breath, all have some kind of wisdom, some entitlement to participate in dialogue and debate, he said. Here he is aligning himself with Job as a fellow human being, both equally created by the one God. Though there is a contention between them, they are essentially on the same side, both on the same footing.

David Clines: Though he thinks Job has drawn the wrong inferences from his sufferings, and though he is determined to set Job’s thinking straight, he is not against Job himself, and his avowed interest is to “*justify*” Job (**v 32**), that is, to get him to a position where Job can be in the right again.

John Hartley: Since Job had frequently expressed his fear of being so overwhelmed that he would be reduced to silence if God should enter into legal dispute with him, Elihu encourages him . . . He will not pressure Job as God has done (cf. **13:21**). That is, Elihu wants to create an atmosphere that will allow Job to argue his case as he wishes, although not with God himself but with God’s representative – a man similar to himself. While the debate may be fierce, Job is encouraged to present his position free from awe of Elihu.

I. (:8-12) TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD = STARTING POINT FOR ELIHU

Francis Andersen: Elihu gives a fairly extended summary of Job’s position, his claim to innocence (**9–11**). Although the words *You say* are not present in the Hebrew of **verse 9**, it is clear from **verse 8** that Elihu considers that he is reproducing what he heard Job say. . . Job had never gone quite this far in explicitly accusing God of malice, dishonesty or injustice, although he often came so close to this that it could seem to the listener that he had.

A. (:8) Job’s Case Reviewed by Elihu

*“Surely you have spoken in my hearing,
And I have heard the sound of your words:”*

David Atkinson: Elihu’s main speech starts in **33:8**. He quotes some of Job’s complaints, and tries to answer them.

Elihu’s case against Job: In the first place, says Elihu, Job has been complaining that

God has simply ignored his sufferings by refusing to answer his prayer (33:13). In 33:14-18 Elihu replies in effect: Job, you are not right to claim that God has been ignoring you. ‘*God does speak*’ (33:14) – sometimes in dreams or visions. In fact God makes himself known in **many different ways**. Even in your nightmares, Job, God has been speaking to you. . .

B. (:9) Job’s Claim of Innocence

*“I am pure, without transgression;
I am innocent and there is no guilt in me.”*

This is a much stronger statement than how Job had characterized his integrity. He never claimed sinlessness, but only that God was responding in judgment that was way overboard in light of his integrity.

C. (:10-11) Job’s Complaint of Divine Opposition

*“Behold, He invents pretexts against me;
He counts me as His enemy.
11 He puts my feet in the stocks;
He watches all my paths.”*

Elmer Smick: We can be sure that **chapter 13** is referred to because **33:10b–11** are virtually identical to **13:24b** and **27a**. However, quoting accurately does not necessarily mean verbatim.

David Clines: it seems that, according to Elihu, Job has been making a fourfold accusation against God.

- (1) God finds pretexts against him, i.e., unreasonable grounds for assaulting him. He has been framed.
- (2) He treats him as an enemy, not as a creature, still less as a pious man.
- (3) He puts Job’s feet in the stocks, i.e., limits his freedom of movement, constrains him to suffer and to be humiliated.
- (4) God spies on all his doings, so that Job feels oppressed and perpetually under scrutiny.

D. (:12) Conclusion of Elihu – Apply the Doctrine of God’s Transcendence

*“Behold, let me tell you,
you are not right in this,
For God is greater than man.”*

Elmer Smick: In v.12 Elihu appeals to **God’s transcendence** as the reason Job is wrong to dispute with him. His words sound banal, for hymns have already been uttered about God’s greatness (4:8–16; 9:2–13; 11:7–9; 12:13–25; 25:2–6); but his purpose is commendable. God’s thoughts and purposes are beyond human ability to comprehend, so how can anyone know what God is doing? But for the moment, beginning in v.13, Elihu sets aside the issue of Job’s guilt or innocence and of God’s transcendence (to both of which he will return) to answer Job’s frequent complaint, **that God will not**

give him a hearing (cf. 9:16, 35; 13:22; 19:7; 23:2–7).

David Clines: Why does Elihu want to remind Job that God is greater than humans, a very obvious fact that Job would be the first to agree with (cf. 9:1–13)? Some think it means that, since God is so much greater than humans, it makes no sense for Job to complain that God is not answering his charges; for God is not accountable to humans, he “does not fit man’s measure” (JB), he “cannot be expected to vindicate His ways to man” (Gibson). Others think that Elihu means that “God is above the petty feelings that Job has attributed to him” in vv 10–11 (Rowley; similarly Duhm “above all arbitrary, unreasoning hostility”; so too Davidson). It is less likely that he means that, because God is more powerful than humans, they cannot successfully argue with him (as Pope). Elihu is very fond of the thought that God is greater than humans (cf. also 36:5, 26)—his God is always a God of power (Fedrizzi)—and for him this is an explanation of practically everything.

II. (:13-14) THESIS STATEMENT – GOD COMMUNICATES IN A VARIETY OF WAYS THAT MAN MIGHT MISS

A. (:13) Restating Job’s Complaint = God Is Not Responsive

*“Why do you complain against Him,
That He does not give an account of all His doings?”*

B. (:14) Refuting Job’s Complaint

*“Indeed God speaks once,
Or twice, yet no one notices it.”*

John Hartley: One of Elihu’s main postulates is that God goes to great efforts to communicate with a person, above all to prevent that person from going astray. Elihu believes that God speaks to a person in many different ways and on many occasions. The sequence of the numbers *one, two* draws attention not to the small number of occasions on which God speaks but to God’s **repetitive efforts** to speak to that person.

Warren Wiersbe: This “young theologian” knew something about public speaking because **Job 33** is a **model address**. First, he stated his **thesis** in **verses 12-14**: God is greater than man and speaks to him in ways that he may not always recognize. He then described three different ways that God may speak to man:

- dreams and visions (vv. 15-18),
- suffering (vv. 19-22),
- and the ministry of the mediating angel (vv. 22-33).

III. (:15-30) THREE METHODS OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION

A. (:15-18) God Speaks in Dreams

1. (:15-16) Manner of Communication

*“In a dream, a vision of the night,
When sound sleep falls on men,*

*While they slumber in their beds,
16 Then He opens the ears of men,
And seals their instruction,”*

David Clines: And this disquisition on dreams is meant to answer Job’s complaint that God will not answer him: God does speak to humans, responds Elihu, even if they do not always recognize it (**v 14b**). Nonetheless, it does not really address Job’s complaint, since he is troubled not about whether God engages in communication with humans in general but about why God refuses to answer his own particular charge of injustice. Auditions in dreams are not the kind of communication Job has been seeking (**Andersen**), but some kind of public announcement of his innocence, some demonstrable restoration of his good name.

2. (:17-18) Purpose of Communication

*“That He may turn man aside from his conduct,
And keep man from pride;
18 He keeps back his soul from the pit,
And his life from passing over into Sheol.”*

David Atkinson: God’s purpose is to turn people aside from the way they are walking, to learn something more of the ways of God: *‘to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword’ (33:17-18).*

Elihu is pointing to God’s presence with Job even though Job has not been aware of it.

The second of Job’s complaints, according to Elihu, is that God has been using his power unjustly. *‘You have said... “... God has found fault with me... He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths”’ (33:8-11).*

This is answered by Elihu in **33:19-28**. God may use even illness and pain as a means of bringing **chastening** to the human spirit. *‘A man may be chastened on a bed of pain, with constant distress in his bones’ (33:19).*

God is not using his power in wanton fashion: sickness can act as a warning signal to make us sit up and take stock.

Elmer Smick: In **chapters 3; 6–7; 10; 14; 16–17; 29; and 30**, Job spoke about **death**, either longing for it or complaining that it was his only hope. The emphasis is not lost on Elihu. After each of the two descriptions of how God communicates with humanity, Elihu ends on the theme that God does so to redeem people’s life from **the pit**. In **vv.18 and 22**, after describing symptoms just like Job’s (**vv.19–21**), Elihu pictures the sufferer at the edge of the pit—exactly where Job found himself—about to go on *“the journey of no return” (16:18–22).*

David Clines: **Keeping alive** is the ultimate good in Elihu’s book: not to descend to the

Pit is what humans most desire, if we are to believe his reiterated references to it (vv 18, 22, 24, 28, 30), and to hold humans back from the Pit is what God himself spends his energies upon. For Job, however, though Elihu will never understand this, it is all one whether he lives or dies (much of the time in fact he thinks death is a preferable state to life [3:20–21; 6:8–9]). The one thing he wants is **justice**, whether in this life or after he is dead (16:18; 19:25–26).

B. (:19-22) God Speaks in Pain and Sickness

John Hartley: A second method God employs to teach or to turn one from the error of his ways is the **discipline of pain**. The use of pain is, of course, a more severe discipline than dreams. God may suddenly bring a serious illness on an enterprising person. With his strength broken a person is no longer able to administer his estate. His suffering is continual and intense, as the phrase *continual aching in his bones* indicates. The pain robs him of the possibility of enjoying any pleasures. Food, above all *dainty food*, becomes loathsome to him, and he cannot enjoy even a piece of *bread*. His once muscular body, symbolic of his well-being and prosperity, wastes away to nothing. His flesh shrivels up until *his bones stick out*. Sapped of all strength, he is close to the brink of the grave where *messengers of death* stand ready to take his soul to Sheol. But God afflicts that person to awaken him to the seriousness of his situation. If the person responds to God's message, he will avoid a premature death.

1. (:19) Manner of Communication

*“Man is also chastened with pain on his bed,
And with unceasing complaint in his bones;”*

Elmer Smick: As **C. S. Lewis** (*The Problem of Pain* [New York: Macmillan, 1943], 93) effectively observes, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God's purpose in suffering is to chasten us for our own good lest we find ourselves face to face with death. But Elihu does not make the crude claim so often on the lips of the counselors—that Job's sufferings are the proof of a wicked life.

2. (:20-22) Purpose of Communication

*“So that his life loathes bread,
And his soul favorite food.
21 His flesh wastes away from sight,
And his bones which were not seen stick out.
Then his soul draws near to the pit,
And his life to those who bring death.”*

C. (:23-30) God Speaks via a Mediating Angel

1. (:23) Manner of Communication

*“If there is an angel as mediator for him,
One out of a thousand,
To remind a man what is right for him,”*

John Hartley: Elihu says that there is a special angel who works for the redemption of the afflicted. The phrase *one among a thousand* is taken by some to mean an ordinary angel, but from the way the phrase is used in **9:3** it is better understood as having very restrictive force. Therefore, this mediating angel is a very special heavenly creature. He may be identified with “*the angel of Yahweh*.” In some OT passages (e.g., **Gen. 16:7-13; Num. 22:35**) there is a close identification between Yahweh and his angel. The role of this angel allows God himself to affect events on earth without compromising his exalted transcendence. In Elihu’s teaching this special angel works for the restoration of those who have strayed from the right way. This means that God does not immediately abandon any of his servants who err. The converse is the truth; he labors zealously for their full restoration to faithful service.

2. (:24-26) Purpose of Communication

a. (:24) To Discover God’s Grace

*“Then let him be gracious to him, and say,
‘Deliver him from going down to the pit,
I have found a ransom’;”*

Elmer Smick: So in a sense this “*angel*” becomes a **third means of revelation** from God to humans. He also provides for mercy in behalf of the sufferer and even provides a ransom to save his life (**v.24**). All this will happen only if one listens to the revelation and turns to God for grace (**v.26a**). Such a redeemed person will openly admit his sin and praise God for his grace (**v.27**).

So Elihu has both agreed and disagreed with Job and with the counselors. He has added the element of **God’s mercy**, a subject avoided by the counselors, who constantly appealed to God’s justice. We must reap what we sow even when we repent and are healed. Elihu feels there is a place for grace. A ransom may have to be paid, but the man is restored and only then comes to make his public confession.

b. (:25) To Have His Life Revived

*“Let his flesh become fresher than in youth,
Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor;”*

c. (:26) To Repent and Enjoy Renewed Fellowship with God

*“Then he will pray to God, and He will accept him,
That he may see His face with joy,
And He may restore His righteousness to man.”*

Francis Andersen: **vv. 23-28** -- The third reference to **the pit** in **verse 30** marks the end of the section, and completes the ‘one, two, three’ pattern (cf. **14, 29**). This section, however, does not record a further mode of **revelation**, but rather a **response** which a man might learn who makes right use of dream or illness as a message from God. He will entrust his cause to a mediator.

David Clines: vv. 23-28 -- When the sick are at death's door, an **angel** may take up the cause of the sufferers and beg God to spare them from death. The sufferers would then be restored to their youthful health and strength, turn to God in prayer, and publicly acknowledge both their wrongdoing and their thankfulness for deliverance. It seems clear (as **Duhm** stresses) that those in view here are basically good people, not the thoroughly godless, who are presumably beyond redemption. . . the nice question arises whether Elihu thinks that what he describes is the situation of Job himself. It seems that it is, for three reasons:

- Elihu never brands Job an evil man;
- he uses language very reminiscent of Job's when he describes the illness of the sufferer (see on v 19);
- and he avers in v 32 that his desire is not to condemn but to "justify" Job.

David Atkinson: The third of Job's complaints to which Elihu draws attention is the claim that he is **innocent**. *'I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt' (33:9)*. Elihu comments that if a man accepts the chastening of sickness and prays to God, then God gives joy and salvation and a song. *'He prays to God and finds favour with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state' (33:26)*.

3. (:27-28) Testimony to God's Grace in Redemption

*"He will sing to men and say,
'I have sinned and perverted what is right,
And it is not proper for me.
28 He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit,
And my life shall see the light.'"*

D. (:29-30) Summary Purpose Statement – To Rescue and Revive

*"Behold, God does all these oftentimes with men,
30 To bring back his soul from the pit,
That he may be enlightened with the light of life."*

David Clines: These summarizing sentences maintain the **positive note** that Elihu has been determined on striking in this chapter. The purpose of suffering, in short, is not to punish, and certainly not to bring the life of erring humans to a close, but to restore sufferers to health. That means not only bringing them back from the edge of the Pit, so that they do not die, but also, more creatively, ensuring that they are "*enlightened with the light of life*."

(:31-33) ELIHU'S CLOSING APPEAL

David Clines: Elihu is not bringing his words to a conclusion, but announcing that he has not yet finished. He asks Job to continue listening to him (v 31). If Job has something he must say now, let him do so (v 32), but if not, Elihu intends to develop

further his teaching of wisdom (v 33). Whichever way Elihu will proceed, Job should know that Elihu's fundamental desire is for Job's **vindication** (v 32b)—not, needless to say, that he should be proved right in his complaint against God, but that he should emerge from his experience of suffering with his righteousness fully upheld.

A. (:31) Listen

*"Pay attention, O Job, listen to me;
Keep silent and let me speak."*

B. (:32) Speak

*"Then if you have anything to say, answer me;
Speak, for I desire to justify you."*

C. (:33) Learn

*"If not, listen to me;
Keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom."*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you value truth over sincerity?
- 2) What application would you make to Job's situation from the doctrine of God's Transcendence?
- 3) Do you see Christological implications in this passage from the references to a mediator, to redemption, to a ransom, etc.?
- 4) Where was Elihu still missing the core message that Job needed to hear?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Atkinson: There is no **glorification of suffering** here, even though some Christian people have sometimes been tempted down that path. Their mistake is that of the three friends, who found a **causal link** between sin and suffering, or between suffering and the good that can come from it.

In **Luke 13**, Jesus refers to the Galileans who had suffered death under Pilate, and to eighteen people who had died when the tower of Siloam fell on them. *'Do you think,'* he is asking, *'that these people were worse sinners than others because these disasters befell them? I tell you, No!'* However, incidents like these call all of us to repentance. Jesus is clearly **rejecting a causal link between sin and suffering** in these cases. He

rejects that link when his disciples ask him about the man born blind: “‘Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.””

Some Christians still fall into the trap of trying to link specific suffering with specific sins.

Elihu is somewhat clearer than this. The Swiss doctor **Paul Tournier** is clearer still. In his book *Creative Suffering*, **Tournier** quotes a remark of a **Doctor Haynal** as part of his discussion of the creative power of suffering:

What then of the relationship that exists between deprivation and suffering and creativity...? But relationship is not the same as cause. You remember Dr Haynal's remark which I quoted: 'There is a relationship between the process of bereavement, loss, deprivation and creativity.' He carefully refrains from saying that it is a relationship of cause and effect. The person matures, develops, becomes more creative, not because of the deprivation in itself, but through his own active response to misfortune, through the struggle to come to terms with it, and morally to overcome it, even if in spite of everything there is no cure... That is the trap, to confuse relationship with cause, and hence to say that suffering is good for one. The distinction is a subtle one, but it is vital.

A further point is made by **Simone Weil** in her meditations on the Christian faith, and the vocation of suffering to which Christ calls some people:

The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for it.

In his own way, Elihu is beginning to grope towards this truth. He is starting to show Job that through his struggle to come to terms with his misfortune, God is at work.

John Hartley: In teaching Job about the disciplinary nature of suffering, Elihu hopes to open up to Job's mind new ways of looking at his affliction. Instead of focusing on the human proneness to error as the comforters have done, Elihu stresses God's persistent love and mercy toward his followers. God does not let those who serve him go astray without any warnings of the danger they are facing nor does he allow them to hasten to the grave unaware. He employs dreams and painful tragedies both to warn and to discipline them. Moreover, he provides the ransom to restore those who trust in him. At the right time his mediating angel secures their release from death's grip. Whoever accepts the angel's work finds renewal of health and restoration of his righteousness.

Elihu is telling Job that God has not been silent, but has been speaking to him in many ways through his dreams and his pains, ways that Job has not expected. He hopes that Job will listen to God's speaking through his misfortune. Then he will turn his attention away from his complaints against God's cruel enmity to focus on God's gracious ways

toward him. It can be said that Elihu is delivering to Job a message of hope, for he wants to help Job find acquittal and full restoration with God.

Derek Kidner: Elihu has brought a note that the other three had singularly failed to do. God has not been silent; he has been shouting to Job in his pain. There is a chastening use of suffering that may be independent of some particular sin. Its purpose may be preventative: it can stop a person from sliding down the slippery path of destruction. Elihu is not all that clear, but he is way ahead of Job's three friends. At least, in Elihu's eyes, Job is not suffering for any sin he has committed in the past. He may be suffering to prevent him from falling into sin in the future! This has a great deal of truth in it, but it fails to answer Job's real dilemma. The truth is that Elihu had no more comprehension of the reasons behind Job's suffering than did Job himself. Only God had the key to that knowledge and thus far at least, he had decided to keep that knowledge to himself. Elihu would have been better to have urged Job to trust God, no matter what, than to try to speculate about answers the veracity of which, at the end of the day, he had no means of proving.

Roy Zuck: Elihu's Quotations of Job in this first speech:

33:9a	<i>"I am pure"</i>	(cf. 6:10; 9:21; 19:7; 12:4; 16:17; 31:6).
33:9b	<i>"Without sin"</i>	(cf. 13:23; 23:11).
33:9c	<i>"I am clean and free from guilt"</i>	(cf. 9:20-21; 10:7; 27:6).
33:10a	<i>"God has found fault with me"</i>	(cf. 10:6).
33:10b	<i>"He considers me His enemy"</i>	(cf. 13:24; 19:11).
33:11a	<i>"He fastens my feet in shackles"</i>	(cf. 13:27).
33:11b	<i>"He keeps close watch on all my paths"</i>	(cf. 7:17-20; 10:14; 13:27).

TEXT: Job 34:1-37

TITLE: ELIHU'S SECOND SPEECH: DEFENSE OF GOD'S JUSTICE

BIG IDEA:

BOTH THE CHARACTER AND GOVERNANCE OF GOD REFUTE ANY CHARGE OF INJUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:

Roy Zuck: Job's Complaint: **God is unjust**; He does not relieve me of my suffering (19:6-7; 27:2; cf. 34:5-6).

Francis Andersen: Elihu's defense of the justice of God, which blends the themes of his power, knowledge and impartiality (10–30), is flanked by open attacks on Job for impiety (2–9) and folly (31–37).

John Hartley: Elihu now defends God's righteous rule against Job's inflammatory complaint that since God fails to keep times of judgment the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. Believing that God never does wrong, Elihu contends that God speedily punishes all the wicked, including powerful kings. He never shows partiality in his judgment. Elihu argues this point so intensely because he seems to fear that Job, in hardening his heart to God's disciplinary judgment, stands in danger of the final punishment, death. Therefore, he wants to convince Job to relinquish his complaint and submit himself to God. . .

Elihu has endeavored to refute both Job's claim of innocence and his complaint that God does not always execute justice in matters on earth by elaborating the thesis that God, the sovereign Lord, governs the world justly. Nothing escapes God's attention nor does he allow any wicked person to exert his influence unchecked. From this perspective Elihu cannot fathom how any human being could demand that God grant him judicial hearing by filing a complaint against God himself. In fact, such a demand reeks of rebellion against God's rule. Job, therefore, needs to accept God's disciplinary punishment rather than questioning God's motives. Otherwise he is deserving of the severest penalty.

Delitzsch: If we confine our attention to the real **substance** of the speech, apart from the emotional and rough accessories, Elihu cast back the reproach of injustice which Job has raised, first as being **contradictory to the being of God, ch. xxxiv. 10** sq.; then he seeks to refute it as **contradicting God's government** ... It is worthy of recognition, that ... his [Elihu's] theodicy [defense of God] differs essentially from that proclaimed by the friends. It is not derived from mere appearance, but lays hold of the very principles.

Warren Wiersbe: Elihu presented three arguments to prove that there is no injustice with God.

- To begin with, if God is unjust, then He is not God (**34:10-15**)
- His second argument is that if God were unjust, there could be no just government on earth (**34:16-20**).
- Elihu's third argument is that if God were unjust, then He must not see what is going on in the world (**34:21-30**).

David Clines: The **nodal verse** is surely **v 17**, "*Can one who hates justice govern?*," for the issue of the speech is the very question of what it means to be a governor, arising as it does from Job's assertion that God has taken away his rights (**v 5**). . . This second speech (**chap. 34**) is of a rather different character. Here the theme is no longer the educative role of suffering, and Elihu's manner has lost some of its expository tone. The theme becomes rather the **rebelliousness of Job against the divine justice**, and the manner becomes correspondingly more **assertive** and **dogmatic**.

The argument in both movements is the same: God, as the supreme governor of the universe, cannot do wrong by failing to requite good and bad behavior appropriately, whereas Job, who is claiming that God has treated him unjustly, is doing wrong by implying that God has perverted justice. . .

In the speech Elihu explores the question of God's justice in a quite thoughtful way. No one can of course equal the power of Job's fierce diatribes against the dogma of divine justice in the face of the realities of human existence. But Elihu in reply does not simply throw up his hands in horror (he does in **vv 5-9**), as the other friends have been inclined to do. Without seeking to resolve the problems of retributive justice or to explain the many contradictions to it that are empirically encountered, he asks rather what it means for God to be the supreme governor of the universe, and what sense a charge of injustice could make in reference to such a one.

Though he refers to God as "*the Righteous Mighty One*" (**v 17**), his point is by no means that for the universal governor might equals right. Rather, he is affirming that the **very business of governing is the dispensing of justice**, and that it makes no sense to envisage an unjust ruler of the world. The special supporting case Elihu takes up is of God's authority over human subordinates, kings and princes, who can be judged and deposed by him without fear or favor (**vv 18-20**). That is what it means to be a governor: **controlling those with power in one's realm**. The evidence from human history and society shows that **God is running a tight ship**, says Elihu: mighty rulers fall in a moment and are replaced by others, a testimony to the divine system of justice that keeps all power holders under perpetual scrutiny (**vv 21-22**), executes instant and public judgment (**vv 23-26**), and ensures that the people they rule are protected from unjust government (**v 30**). Indeed, the dispensing of life and death across the whole creation (**vv 14-15**) is a signal that the divine writ runs everywhere, requiting to everyone according to their deeds, whether for weal or for woe (**v 11**). Even if God appears to be inactive in just rulership, behind the scenes he is controlling the fate of nations and individuals alike (**vv 29c-30**).

There are just two flaws in Elihu's argument. First, the evidence of history is against it. Tyrants may fall in an instant, but do they, as a matter of course? Secondly, he does not allow for the possibility that the supreme governor of the universe is himself an arbitrary tyrant. If the second rung of world governors, kings and princes and the like, can include evildoers who should be deposed, who is to say that the very top rung is not occupied by the ultimate malign force? It is not a question that very often arises, for most of those who do not believe in an all-just God do not believe in any God at all. But it is precisely Job's question, for while he does not for a moment doubt the existence of God, he deeply questions God's integrity. And so Elihu, like all the other friends, talks right past Job.

(:1-4) PROLOGUE – ELIHU'S SECOND SPEECH

"Then Elihu continued and said,"

(:2-4) CALL FOR DISCERNMENT

Elmer Smick: In **12:11–12** Job was sarcastic about the bad "*food*" the counselors had been dishing out to him under the guise of "the wisdom of the aged." Elihu here is determined to show where real wisdom lies, where food may be found that is really good. He calls for all who are wise to join him in his banquet of words to find out how good they are.

A. (:2) Listen to Me

*"Hear my words, you wise men,
And listen to me, you who know."*

Derek Kidner: He is not speaking to Job, but to the "*wise men*" (**34:2**), possibly the three friends. His point is simple and forceful: if God is just (as he undoubtedly is), any criticism of him is necessarily unjust. Since Job has been criticizing God, he is in the wrong. The case against Job seems irrefutable.

The problem with this kind of reasoning is that it has failed to take into account Job's actual predicament. Elihu is arguing in a manner that seems divorced from the reality of Job's pain. What he says is true in general, but misses the point that Job is making.

His theology is impeccable: God's right to rule owes itself to no one except God himself (**34:13**). He is the sovereign Sustainer who reveals his grace every moment of the day by granting life and breath to man (**34:14-15**). God is "*the just and mighty One*" (**34:17**). He rules without "*partiality*" (**34:18-19**). The mighty die at God's command (**34:20**). They are not in control of it in any way (**34:23**). He does not have to give an account for what he does: he may bring down the mighty suddenly and quickly (**34:24-25**). Those who have abused their power will be punished (**34:26-28**). Even if God seems slow to act, that is his prerogative: God cannot be accused of injustice (**34:29-30**).

For Elihu, then, Job's demand for vindication is constantly imputing wrong to God. Job has, by this demand, added "*rebellion*" to his sins (34:37).

B. (:3) Exercise Discernment

*"For the ear tests words,
As the palate tastes food."*

Peter Wallace: The Discerning Ear Will Know the Good (v.1-4)

C. (:4) Choose What is Right and Good

*"Let us choose for ourselves what is right;
Let us know among ourselves what is good."*

John Hartley: Elihu asks he wise to *listen* attentively (*he 'ezin*), for *the ear* discerns the truth of the spoken word just as the *palate tastes food* (cf. 12:11). He requests that they join him in deciding which line of argumentation, Job's or his, is *right (mispāt)* and *good (tob)*. *Right* stands for that which is legally correct and *good* for that which is morally sound. If the elders side with his position, Elihu is hopeful that Job will change his mind and leave off his complaint against God.

I. (:5-9) ELIHU'S MISCHARACTERIZATION OF JOB'S ATTACK AGAINST GOD'S JUSTICE

A. (:5) Job's Complaint against God

*"For Job has said, 'I am righteous,
But God has taken away my right;'"*

Peter Wallace: When you are talking with someone else, you need to work hard to understand them on their own terms. (Not that you need to agree with their way of thinking – but until you understand how they think, you will never answer them clearly and cogently).

B. (:6) Job's Incurable Wound Despite His Integrity

*"Should I lie concerning my right?
My wound is incurable,
though I am without transgression."*

David Guzik: This was another slight **mischaracterization** of what Job said. Job certainly did claim to be wounded so severely by his trials that it might seem incurable; yet again he never claimed to be sinless. He only claimed that there was not some special sin that made him the target of this special catastrophe.

C. (:7-8) Job's Condemnation by Elihu

1. (:7) Worthy of Derision

*“What man is like Job,
Who drinks up derision like water,”*

John Hartley: The picture is that of a very thirsty person gulping down large amounts of water. With a similar metaphor Eliphaz had said that a vile, corrupt man drinks iniquity like water (**15:16**). What Eliphaz had implied about Job, Elihu says bluntly. He charges that Job has accepted the scorn heaped on him without shame. He comes to this conclusion, for he is convinced that the taunting that Job bears does not move him to adopt a humble attitude.

2. (:8) Walks with the Wicked

*“Who goes in company with the workers of iniquity,
And walks with wicked men?”*

D. (:9) Job’s Outrageous Conclusion Mischaracterized by Elihu

*“For he has said,
‘It profits a man nothing
When he is pleased with God.’”*

Elmer Smick: Verse 9 is not a direct quotation of Job. In **21:15** Job imagined wicked people saying this, and then Job complained that calamity did not come very often on them (**21:17**). So it is only by **implication** that Elihu can accuse Job. His accusation is based on Job’s sentiment that **the righteous get the same treatment as the wicked**.

David Guzik: Job certainly said nothing like this. We can understand how Elihu thought this about Job, because Job claimed to delight in God and he now seemed to claim that it profited him nothing. But Elihu is taking general trains of thought of Job, and extending them further than Job did.

Mason: What most alarmed Elihu about Job was that somehow this man had the cheek to blame God for his problems, and yet still to consider himself righteous and faithful.

David Clines: The clinching example of Job’s harmful theology is, according to Elihu, his statement that **there is no profit in religion**. It is true that Job has said, in two classic passages at least, that there is no reward for good or punishment for evil: in **9:22** he has said that God destroys both righteous and wicked alike, and in **21:7** that the wicked live to a ripe old age and are not cut off for their sins. In the one place, that sounds as if there is no profit in religion because there is no profit anywhere, in the other as if there is no profit in religion because there is no retributive punishment anywhere. Either way, Elihu’s report of Job’s theology seems fair. Yet it is this same Job who has also described the wicked as those who say, *“What gain shall we have if we pray to him?”* (**21:15**). On this matter of profit Job has been in a **double bind**: if he says religion is profitable, it means that his piety is not disinterested (as well as contradicting his own experience); but if he says religion is unprofitable, he aligns himself with the wicked who have no time for God. For Elihu it is obvious that Job’s language is **impious** (as also talk of the unprofitability of religion is in **Mal 3:14**), but

for Job it is **the language of a God-obsessed man wrestling with the problems of theodicy.**

II. (:10-30) ELIHU'S DEFENSE OF GOD'S JUSTICE

Matthew Henry: He undertakes to convince him that he had spoken amiss, by showing very fully,

1. God's incontestable justice, **ver 10-12, 17, 19, 23.**
2. His sovereign dominion, **ver 13-15.**
3. His almighty power, **ver 20, 24.**
4. His omniscience, **ver 21, 22, 25.**
5. His severity against sinners, **ver 26-28.**
6. His overruling providence, **ver 29, 30.**

A. (:10-15) Impossible for God to Pervert Justice

(:10a) Appeal for Discernment

"Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding."

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

John Hartley: With the conjunction *Therefore* Elihu marks the transition from his presentation of Job's position to the development of his own thesis. At this point he again entreats the wise to listen to his words. The wise are called *men of understanding* ('*anse lebab*, lit. "*men of heart*"). With the solemn adjuration *far be it* (*halila*), Elihu loudly exclaims his thesis that God could never do *evil* (*resa*) or *wrong* ('*awel*). He formulates the thesis negatively to enhance its impact. Then he states the reason for this thesis positively.

1. (:10b-12) Based on General Principle

- a. (:10b) Injustice Is Inconsistent with God's Character

*“Far be it from God to do wickedness,
And from the Almighty to do wrong.”*

Elmer Smick: From this point on throughout the next twenty-one verses, Elihu expounds on the theme that *“God only does right.”* Notice how he repeats himself to emphasize this theme in **vv.10** and **12**. . . Whether Job has seen it or not, Elihu insists on that most basic truth: *“For truly God cannot perpetrate evil”* (*‘It is unthinkable that God would do wrong!’* NIV, **v.12**).

- b. (:11) Immutability of Retribution Theology
*“For He pays a man according to his work,
And makes him find it according to his way.”*

David Guzik: Many people today believe the idea of Elihu (and Eliphaz) and believe it as an **absolute spiritual law** instead of a **general principle**. Some take the passage from **Galatians 6:7**: *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*. Yet it is important to understand the **context** of Paul’s statement, which was encouragement and exhortation for Christians to give materially for the support of their ministers. It is true that the principle of **Galatians 6:7** has application beyond giving and supporting teachers and ministers. It has a general application in life; what we get out is often what we put in. Yet Paul did not promote some law of **spiritual karma** that ensures we will receive good when we do good things or always receive bad when we do bad things. If there were such an absolute spiritual law, it would surely damn us all. Instead, Paul simply related the principle of sowing and reaping to the way we manage our resources before the Lord. He used the same picture in **1 Corinthians 9:11** and **2 Corinthians 9:6-10**.

- c. (:12) Impossibility of God Perverting Justice
*“Surely, God will not act wickedly,
And the Almighty will not pervert justice.”*

2. (:13-15) Based on God’s Independent and Transcendent Governance

David Clines: Perhaps the best line of approach is this: if life, which depends entirely on God’s decision, continues as it does, it shows that God is not perverting the justice due to the righteous. You have only to assume, says Elihu, that there are righteous people and that they deserve to live. The fact that they continue to live shows that God is not acting wickedly; if he were, they would be dead. He has only to withdraw his breath, and they would meet their fate. . . Only those who deserve to live are alive, so Elihu believes. Ergo, God does not pervert justice.

John Hartley: This teaching means that whatever misfortune a person experiences is justly deserved. There are no exceptions, for God makes no mistakes. Elihu resolutely renounces Job’s stern accusation against God when he said: *“Know then that God has put me in the wrong and closed his net about me”* (**19:6**). Elihu is convinced that in

statements like this Job has gone too far in his questioning and is guilty of rebelling against God.

a. (:13) Accountable to Nobody

*“Who gave Him authority over the earth?
And who has laid on Him the whole world?”*

Delitzsch: There is ... a divine love which has called the world into being and keeps it in being; and this love, as the perfect opposite of sovereign caprice, is a pledge for the **absolute righteousness** of the divine rule.

David Clines: God’s undisputed sovereignty over the world ensures that whatever he wants to happen does happen, and thus, implicitly, that if some humans are rewarded and some are punished, that is God’s implementation of his ruling principle of retribution.

John Hartley: With rhetorical questions Elihu asks who gave God the right to rule. The answer is, of course, no one! God, being supreme, does not have to report to anyone. Since his right to rule is inherent in his being, any challenge of his rule is a disparagement of his person.

b. (:14-15) Sovereign over All Life

*“If He should determine to do so,
If He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath,
15 All flesh would perish together,
And man would return to dust.”*

David Guzik: Here, Elihu wanted to emphasize the idea of God’s **independence** and **transcendence**. He wanted Job to remember that God was so mighty that Job was entirely wrong to question Him at all.

David Clines: As the sole governor and sustainer of the universe (v 13), God would find it very easy to destroy all his creation (vv 14b–15), if he set his mind to it (v 14a). But he does not do so because that would be unjust to those who deserve to live, and he would not be true to himself if he did not uphold the rights of the righteous.

John Hartley: Since all human existence is contingent on God’s will, a person risks his life in contesting God’s lordship.

B. (:16-30) Implementation of Justice = Essence of Governance

(:16) Appeal for Discernment

*“But if you have understanding, hear this;
Listen to the sound of my words.”*

1. (:17-20) Disregard for Justice Out of the Question

Elmer Smick: From all this Elihu maintains that people are not in a position to stand as God's judge (v.17). Without God's impartial judgment, especially on those who hold power (vv.18–19), the world would dissolve into **hopeless anarchy**. Because of his omnipotence, no one can influence him as he actively governs.

David Clines: In the first strophe of this address to Job, Elihu argues that **just rule is of the essence of God's sovereignty**. Deciding cases, discriminating between suppliants, ordering the social framework, impartially dispensing justice, that is the very business of a ruler. Anyone who does not care for that line of work does not become a sovereign: *does an enemy of justice govern (v 17a)*? Elihu's thought is not so crass as some of his commentators make out: he is far from arguing that might is right or that God's power in itself is all the guarantee needed for the rightness of his judgments. And Elihu is not much concerned here with the case of tyrants and unjust rulers (except insofar as they lie under God's judgment, v 18), though as limiting cases they are not a little damaging to his position. The center of his thesis is this: **rectitude is bound up in the notion of sovereignty**.

a. (:17) Perversion of Justice Out of the Question

“Shall one who hates justice rule?

And will you condemn a righteous mighty one,”

Warren Wiersbe: However, Elihu made a big mistake in singling out and emphasizing only one divine attribute, the justice of God; for God is also loving and gracious. (Bildad had made the same mistake in his speeches.) In His wisdom, God devised a plan of redemption that satisfies both His justice and His love (**Rom. 3:21-31**). Because of the Cross, God can redeem sinners and still magnify His righteousness and uphold His holy law.

John Hartley: In the OT it is assumed that **justice** is the foundation of God's rule (cf. **Ps. 96:4-13**). Elihu highlights this dogma by juxtaposing two of God's honorific titles: *the Righteous One (saddiq)* and *the Mighty One (kabbir)*, cf. **Ps. 99:4**). In this way of thinking, if it is true that God fails to judge justly, as Job complains, then Job's belief that God is **all-powerful** is invalid. But since Job still thinks that God rules supremely, then he is surely mistaken in his charge that God hates justice. It is logically impossible in Elihu's reasoning for one who hates justice to *govern (habas)*. This argument had much more weight in ancient times than today (cf. **Prov. 16:10-15; 20:8**), for the philosophy behind Western democracies requires the separation of the judicial system from the executive branch of government. But in ancient thought **justice and power** were believed to be united in the ideal ruler. The word translated *govern (habas)*, lit. “*to bind*”) is significant. It has this meaning only in this passage. This word has many special usages: “*to saddle (an animal)*”; “*to heal*,” i.e., to bind up a wound for healing; “*to wrap*” on a turban. In Syriac and Arabic it also means “*to put in irons, imprison*.” With God as its subject it often carries the sense of *healing* (**Ps. 147:2-3; cf. Hos. 6:1; Isa. 30:26; 61:1**). Elihu may have chosen this word to mean “*govern*” in order to emphasize the **redemptive nature** of God's rule.

b. (:18-19) Partiality in Justice Out of the Question

*“Who says to a king, 'Worthless one,'
To nobles, 'Wicked ones';
19 Who shows no partiality to princes,
Nor regards the rich above the poor,
For they all are the work of His hands?”*

David Clines: God is impartial because from his perspective all humans are on a common footing, as equally his creatures (the reference in the third colon is probably to all humans, rather than to rulers, as **Peake** suggested). And again, it is not their creatureliness that disposes God to act kindly toward them; it is that their common status as the “work of his hands” makes the social distinctions they have engineered among themselves entirely insignificant.

Roy Zuck: **Partiality** on God’s part is out of the question because He is not influenced by men’s power or money.

c. (:20) Justice Administered Swiftly and Unexpectedly – Even to the Most Powerful

*“In a moment they die,
and at midnight people are shaken and pass away,
And the mighty are taken away without a hand.”*

2. (:21-30) Demonstration of Justice Apparent to All

Elmer Smick: Such impartial governance of the world is typified by God’s punishment of the wicked rulers who disregard his ways. This justice lies behind all the order there is, and it is confirmed and guaranteed by God’s omniscience as well as his omnipotence. Job had complained over the delay of justice (**21:19; 24:1**). Elihu maintains that God does not have to set times for inquiry and judgment. His omniscience enables him to judge all the time. God hears the cry of the poor and needy and punishes the wicked openly, but it is his prerogative to remain silent if and when it pleases him (**v.29**). Even then he keeps his control over individuals and nations for the common good (**vv.29c–30?**). And even then he may use the wicked to punish the wicked and so keep the godless from ruling.

a. (:21-22) God Sees All

*“For His eyes are upon the ways of a man,
And He sees all his steps.
22 There is no darkness or deep shadow
Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.”*

David Clines: **vs. 21** -- Despite appearances, it is not to Elihu’s purpose to turn his attention to the fate of evildoers in general. His theme in the speech as a whole is the **justice of God’s universal governorship** (**vv 10, 12**), and one of his proofs of it has been God’s readiness to bring to book subordinate rulers who deviate from his

standards (vv 18–19). They have been the focus in v 18, where God evaluates kings and high-ranking officials; in v 19, where he is beyond partiality; and in v 20, where his execution of judgment against the “mighty” removes them from their office.

b. (:23) God Needs No Investigative Dialogue

*“For He does not need to consider a man further,
That he should go before God in judgment.”*

John Hartley: Conversely, no human being has the prerogative *to set a time to come before God in judgment*. God, whose reign is just and sovereign, is too exalted to have to give any accounting of his rule to anyone. In his sovereign wisdom he appropriately sets the seasons of judgment.

c. (:24-25) God Strikes Down the Mighty

*“He breaks in pieces mighty men without inquiry,
And sets others in their place.
25 Therefore He knows their works,
And He overthrows them in the night,
And they are crushed.”*

David Clines: Significantly, Elihu includes in his depiction of God’s judgment on these unjust rulers the fact that he “*sets others in their place*” (v 24b). For God’s purpose is not only to punish the unjust by removing their authority; it is equally to supply alternative rulers, worthier and more honest, in order to ensure that good government is restored.

d. (:26-30) God Renders Judgment on His Terms

1) (:26-27) Judges the Rebellious

*“He strikes them like the wicked in a public place,
27 Because they turned aside from following Him,
And had no regard for any of His ways;”*

David Guzik: Elihu meant this as a **warning** for Job. God’s judgment was so perfect that He judged the kings and princes of this world without partiality. Therefore, if Job did not repent of the sin that prompted his crisis and his sinful response to it, he could be certain God would judge him as one who *turned back* from Him.

John Hartley: Elihu stresses God’s punishment of the wicked. God strikes the guilty *for their wickedness in a public place*. Such punishment is a just recompense for their clandestine ways of exploiting the poor and afflicted, causing those innocent victims public disgrace. . . . God punishes these arrogant rulers in a manner that shames them deeply.

2) (:28) Judges the Oppressors

*“So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him,
And that He might hear the cry of the afflicted—“*

3) (:29-30) Judges According to His Timetable

*“When He keeps quiet, who then can condemn?
And when He hides His face, who then can behold Him,
That is, in regard to both nation and man?—
30 So that godless men should not rule,
Nor be snares of the people.”*

Francis Andersen: No explanation is necessary, so **Job has no grounds for complaint** because God has been silent to him. God is not beholden to any man for explanations, which, in any case, a man might not grasp because he sees but a few of the facts, whereas God sees all. But **verses 29f.** are not satisfactory, and some have found in them a darker and more disturbing thought. Even if God is quite inactive, leaving evil unchecked, **who can condemn?** If he chooses to hide his face, **who can make him show it?** The only possible explanation, brought out by NEB, is that ‘*he makes a godless man king to punish ‘a stubborn nation’*. The prophets were able to entertain the thought that the Assyrian was the rod of God’s anger (e.g. **Isa. 10:5**), and Habakkuk could think the same about the Babylonians. But they always added that these nations, despite such use by God, were fully accountable for their evil deeds, and would in due time pay for them. But this involves a historical stage, group guilt, and long spans of time, which are not used in the book of Job. This keeps the problem focused on the apparent injustice of God’s treatment of one man, Job.

David Clines: Since the theme of God’s assured control of his subordinate governors is what animates this strophe, it is only proper that at its end the purpose of his ever-watchfulness over both nations and persons (**v 29c**) should become explicit: it is in order that unjust rulers should not survive or treat their peoples like the prey of a wild animal.

John Hartley: Though God remains silent, i.e., he lets affairs on earth take their ordinary course so that a tyrant rises to rule over a nation, who among mankind would ever be in a position *to condemn him* as Job has (e.g., **24:1-17**)? When God *hides his face* (i.e., himself) or seems to withdraw his influence from the course of events on earth, no one can behold him. Then evil appears to reign supreme. Nevertheless, God still in control over both a *nation* (*goy*) and a *man* (*‘adam*). God does not permit a *godless man* (*hanep*) to establish a long, enduring rule. Such a tyrant is characterized as one who *lays snares*, i.e., uses deceitful schemes, to capture or coerce *the people*. Elihu holds that even if this is true, no claim that God rules unjustly could ever be substantiated. God’s slowness to act does not deny his sovereignty.

III. (:31-37) PERSONAL POLEMIC AGAINST JOB

Peter Wallace: In **verses 31-37** Elihu concludes that wise men and men of understanding will convict Job.

- Job, he says, answers like wicked men.
- Job has embraced the counsel of the wicked.

David Clines: Elihu turns to Job again with his advice on what Job should be saying, formulating for him, a bit presumptuously, the very words he should use by way of confession of his wrongdoing. For Elihu the only way forward is for Job to acknowledge his sin and to promise he will not offend again (**vv 31–32**). He cannot expect that God will adopt his standards of justice and reward him as Job himself sees fit, especially when Job has declared himself so violently in opposition to God (**v 33ab**). Though Elihu can offer advice, it is of no value unless Job makes up his own mind about how he will act: he needs to sort out where he stands now, and make an **open confession** of what he really believes (**v 34cd**).

A. (:31-33) Call for Job to Repent

1. (:31) Respond to Divine Discipline

*“For has anyone said to God,
‘I have borne chastisement;
I will not offend anymore;’”*

David Guzik: Here, Elihu spoke the words of **humble repentance** that he thought Job should have said. Job was the anyone that Elihu had in mind.

- He should have taken the chastening like a man.
- He should have promised to offend no more, therefore admitting his previous guilt.
- He should have humbly submitted, asking God to teach him.

John Hartley: Elihu formulates for Job a confession for one who has arrogantly challenged God’s rule. Job should say, *“I am guilty. I will not offend [habal] again.”* Then he needs to ask God to *teach* him what he does not see. Also, he must be resolved to cease doing whatever iniquity he has done. These are elements of true repentance.

2. (:32) Reveal to Me Secret Sins

*“Teach Thou me what I do not see;
If I have done iniquity, I will do it no more?”*

3. (:33) Render Your Decision

*“Shall He recompense on your terms,
because you have rejected it?
For you must choose, and not I;
Therefore declare what you know.”*

John Hartley: It is difficult to make full sense out of **v. 33** in this context. The verse seems to contain a question put to Job, seeking to convince him of the absurdity of his resolve to demand that God prove his innocence. It is foolish for Job to think that God would recompense on his own *terms*. Particularly Job is mistaken in supposing that God would subject himself to his avowal of innocence (**chs. 29-31**). Elihu then

summons Job to make a choice, for Elihu cannot make that choice for him. Should Job still disagree, however, Elihu enjoins him to speak what he knows.

B. (:34-37) Condemnation of Job for Rebellion

1. (:34-35) Demonstrates a Lack of Wisdom

*“Men of understanding will say to me,
And a wise man who hears me,
35 'Job speaks without knowledge,
And his words are without wisdom.’”*

2. (:36-37) Demonstrates a Spirit of Rebellion

*“Job ought to be tried to the limit,
Because he answers like wicked men.
37 For he adds rebellion to his sin;
He claps his hands among us,
And multiplies his words against God.”*

John Hartley: Caught up in his own rhetoric, Elihu pronounces an imprecation against Job. . . In Elihu’s view Job’s answers to the friends are the kind of answers that the impious would give. Therefore, being guilty of impiety, he deserves the harshest fate.

Francis Andersen: **Verse 37** is pretty blunt in its accusation. Earlier Job’s irreverence was attributed to **stupidity** rather than to **wickedness**. The former might be cured by instruction in wisdom. The cure of the latter is more difficult, especially when it is willful and repeated.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are times in your life when you felt like God was being unfair towards you?
- 2) How do each of the attributes of God make Him the Supreme Judge?
- 3) When are you perplexed and discouraged by God’s timetable for administering justice?
- 4) How do you respond to God’s discipline in your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Constable: Elihu asserted, in contrast to Job's beliefs, that God's creative order excludes all partiality (**vv. 16-20**), and His omniscience qualifies Him to be an impartial

judge (vv. 21-23). Therefore, God was not answerable to anyone, including Job (vv. 31-37; cf. v. 13). In this section, Elihu became very heavy-handed (cf. vv. 33, 36). Some sin that Job had committed had brought on his suffering, Elihu concluded, but Job's consequent rebellion against God made him doubly guilty (v. 37).

Roy Zuck: Elihu's Quotations of Job in Second Speech:

34:5a	<i>"I am innocent [righteous]"</i>	(cf. 9:15, 20; 27:6).
34:5b	<i>"God denies me justice"</i>	(cf. 19:6-7; 27:2).
34:6a	<i>"I am right"</i>	(cf. 27:5-6).
34:6b	<i>"I am guiltless"</i>	(cf. 10:7; chap. 31).
34:6d	<i>"His arrow inflicts an incurable wound"</i>	(cf. 6:4; 16:13).
34:9	<i>"It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God"</i>	(cf. 21:15).

Elihu cited several evidences in support of His **unflinching justice**.

- (1) God gives man what he deserves, meting out punishment for sin (34:11).
- (2) For God to do wrong (v. 10) or pervert justice (cf. 8:3) would be inconsistent with His character and therefore unthinkable (34:12).
- (3) Having independent authority as the world's Sovereign, no one could influence Him away from justice (v. 13).
- (4) As the Sustainer of human life God, if He wished, could withdraw His spirit (or "*Spirit*," NIV marg.) and breath instantly and everyone would perish at once (cf. 12:10; 27:3; 33:4), but in His goodness to mankind He does not do that.
- (5) If God were unjust, how could He govern the world? (v. 17) To accuse the just . . . One of injustice is obviously wrong.
- (6) God does not hesitate to judge incapable and wicked *kings . . . nobles . . . princes*, and the *rich*.
- (7) God has all the facts in every case, for in His omniscience, He sees everything everyone does (v. 21; cf. 24:23) so sinners cannot escape His judging by hiding in the darkness. Unlike human judges, God has no need to investigate cases (34:23; cf. Zophar's words in 11:11). God can put down the mighty (cf. 34:20) and set up others in their place, overthrowing and crushing them in the night (cf. v. 20).
- (8) God is fair for He does not overlook wickedness. His eyes are on the ways of men (v. 21) recalls Job's similar words in 24:23. God punishes those who reject and disregard Him and who mistreat the poor and the needy (34:26-28).
- (9) God's justice is seen in that, even though He may choose for a while to do nothing about sin and to remain silent to Job's and others' pleas for speedy justice, yet He as the

Sovereign Ruler over man and nation alike will see that a godless man (*hanep*, “*irreligious person*”; cf. **8:13**) does not continue indefinitely and triumph endlessly (**34:29-30**). Job might not see God when He chose to remain silent (cf. Job’s complaint along that line, **23:8-9**) but that did not give him the right to condemn God (cf. **19:7; 30:20**).

David Thompson: GOD ALWAYS DOES THAT WHICH IS RIGHT AND GOD’S PEOPLE MAY ACTUALLY DEVELOP TO A GREATER LEVEL OF BLESSING EVEN THROUGH NEGATIVE THINGS BY REALIZING THIS AND NOT QUESTIONING OR CRITICIZING GOD.

We may not know for sure what God is doing, but we may be certain of the fact that God will never do that which is unjust or wrong. God knows what He is doing.

Now this chapter breaks down into two main addresses, which are determined by the use of the pronouns. In **verses 1-15**, the pronouns “*you*” and “*us*” are **plural**. But in **verses 16-37**, the pronoun “*you*” is **singular** (**16, 17, 33**). This then becomes an easy way to analyze this chapter:

ADDRESS #1 – Elihu addresses the three. 34:1-15

The first address that Elihu gives is specifically aimed at the three guys who had been criticizing Job. There are four main features to this address:

Feature #1 - Elihu appeals to the three to listen to him. **34:1-4**

Feature #2 - Elihu states something Job has claimed. **34:5-6**

Feature #3 - Elihu analyzes Job’s character. **34:7-9**

Feature #4 - Elihu defends God’s character. **34:10-15**

ADDRESS #2 – Elihu addresses Job. 34:16-37

There are eight specific thoughts that Elihu wants to present to Job:

(Thought #1) - One who hates justice will not ever be permitted to rule by God. **34:17a**

(Thought #2) - No one should dare condemn nor criticize God. **34:17b-18**

(Thought #3) - God is an impartial judge. **34:19**

(Thought #4) - God demonstrates His impartiality by death. **34:20**

(Thought #5) - God sees all men and all they do. **34:21-23**

(Thought #6) - God crushes one leader and raises up another leader. **34:24-30**

- God destroys and replaces leaders without consulting anyone. **34:24**
- God analyzes leaders and quickly overthrows them. **34:25**
- God takes out a leader publicly. **34:26**
- God removes leaders because they turn aside from following Him. **34:27a**
- God removes leaders because they have no regard for His ways. **34:27b**
- God removes leaders when they afflict the poor. **34:28**
- God watches individual and national leaders even when He is silent. **34:29**

- God will not permit a godless man to last long. **34:30**
(Thought #7) - God will not ever stoop to man's terms. **34:31-33**
(Thought #8) - Elihu analyzes Job's words. **34:35-37**

David Atkinson: Elihu's God is a God of almighty justice. Is he the author of all things? Is he the author of evil? Elihu seems to get very near to saying so here. For him, might is right. There is no hint, of course, of that other story between God and the Satan, of which we were told at the beginning. We know that there is a difference here between God's perfect ordering of the world, and God's permissive will in which, for reasons of his own, he lets the Satan have some rein. All unknown to Job and to Elihu, God and the Satan are working some inscrutable providence in which Job's own fortunes are caught up. But Elihu presumes to understand! Yet his only way of understanding the ways of God is in terms of God's power and might. He says a lot about divine justice, but not a word about divine grace. The speech can be summarized by **34:11**: *'He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves.'* Here Elihu is rationalizing the **orthodoxy of desert** (*'You get what you deserve'*). We are back again to Eliphaz's faulty logic.

Tremper Longman: Elihu again feels it necessary to exhort his hearers (and his words presuppose more than just Job) to pay attention to him. He accuses Job of laying down the gauntlet by saying he is innocent and that God attacks him without provocation (**vv. 2–6**). By doing this, Job aligns himself with evildoers. He wrongly accuses God of not rewarding those who are obedient to him (**vv. 7–9**). Thus Elihu reasserts the doctrine of retribution by saying that God repays people according to their deeds (**vv. 10–12**). After all, God is ruler of the earth by virtue of his nature, not by election or appointment. All life depends on him (**vv. 13–15**). In the longest section of the chapter, Elihu asserts that God is just and that Job (and anyone else for that matter) is wrong to accuse him of injustice. God will eventually take care of the wicked. If they seem to prosper, their success is short lived (**vv. 16–30**). Elihu then bemoans the fact that people do not respond well to God's discipline. The implication is that Job is such a person, and Elihu urges him to make peace with God (**vv. 31–33**). But Job is not responding well to the truth (**34:34–37**).

TEXT: Job 35:1-16

TITLE: ELIHU'S THIRD SPEECH: WAITING FOR GOD WHEN HE IS SILENT

BIG IDEA:

DEFENDING THE JUSTICE OF GOD INVOLVES WRESTLING WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

This is going to be a **sermon of Questions** rather than Answers.

Roy Zuck: Job's Complaint: **God is unconcerned.** He does not reward me for my innocence (10:7; cf. 35:3). . .

In this speech Elihu defended God's sovereignty in answer to Job's charge that God did not reward him for his innocence. Elihu's answer was twofold:

- (a) Since God is supreme, He is not affected one way or the other by man's innocence or sin, and
- (b) God was not answering Job's cries because of his pride.

David Clines: The **structure** of this third speech is straightforward. It has two parts, corresponding to the two main points Elihu is making. The first part is also distinguished from the second by its being couched entirely in the second person as an address to Job; in the second part, only vv 14–15 are addressed to Job (and even then only v 14 contains second-person verbs). . .

The **two nodal verses** reflect the twin interests of Elihu in this speech: v 8 communicates the theme of justice as a **human-to-human relation**: "*It is your fellows who suffer from your wickedness; it is other humans who benefit from your righteousness,*" and v 13 addresses the theme of suffering that does not deserve deliverance: "*God does not of course listen to an empty plea; the Almighty pays it no attention.*"

In this speech he treats two further questions about justice: first, whether justice is best understood as what is due to a person and, second, whether justice in God demands that he deliver victims of oppression from their suffering.

Pulpit Commentary: In this short chapter, once more Elihu addresses himself to Job, first (**verses 1-8**) answering his complaint that a life of righteousness has brought him no correspondent blessings; and then (**verses 9-14**) explaining to him that his prayers and appeals to God have probably not been answered because they were not preferred in a right spirit, *i.e.* with faith and humility. Finally (**verse 15, 16**), he condemns Job for haughtiness and arrogance, and reiterates the charge that he "*multiplies words without knowledge*" (comp. Job 34:35-37).

(:1) PROLOGUE – ELIHU’S THIRD SPEECH

“Then Elihu continued and said,”

I. (:2-8) QUESTION #1: WHAT IS THE POINT OF BEING GOOD?

Tremper Longman: Elihu starts the next part of his speech by once again (33:8–11; 34:5–6, 9) providing a **summary of Job’s position** (35:2–3). In 34:5 he said that Job claimed to be righteous; now (35:2) he says that Job claims to be righteous in a way that implies God is not. In 34:9 he represented Job as saying that people get no benefit from God; in 35:3 Job, according to Elihu, repeats this thought. In responding to Job and his friends (v. 4), Elihu argues against Job’s view by saying that God does not benefit from people, whether they are good or bad (vv. 5–8).

Elmer Smick: Elihu begins (vv.1–3) by showing Job how **inconsistent** he has been to claim in one breath that God will vindicate him and then in another to complain he gets no profit out of not sinning (cf. 34:9). In other words, if God is so unjust, why does Job want to be vindicated by him? A colloquial way of phrasing the question would be: **What is the use of being good if God does not care?** Elihu has missed Job’s point, namely, that he wants to be vindicated because he does believe God is just. Of course Job, in his struggle to understand what God is doing, has sent out two signals, one of which Elihu, like the others, has not been able to hear.

Roy Zuck: How could Job ever hope to be vindicated by God (cf. 13:18) as being innocent while at the same time he insisted that his innocence was of no value before God? Such a position was **inconsistent**, Elihu argued.

A. (:2-4) Is It Inconsistent to Demand Vindication from a God Whose Justice You Challenge?

1. (:2) Who Determines What is Right?

a. How Can You Tell If God Is Treating You Fairly?

“Do you think this is according to justice?”

David Clines: The connection between the two parts of the speech hangs on the initial clause, lit. *“Do you consider this for justice?”* (v 2a). In the first part, the issue is the more theoretical one whether there is any injustice in the working of the principle of retribution, in the second it is a general question why sufferers are not always delivered, which develops into the more practical question of whether there is any injustice in Job’s not being answered by God.

David Whitcomb: Our sense of **justice** expects God to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. But our sense of justice can be, and often is, **skewed**. We are finite and do not always know or understand what God is doing at any given time with any given person. Nor do we perceive God’s goals either temporary or eternal. Nor do we truly

know how wicked or how righteous any given person is. Nor do we always have a perfect understanding of righteousness. And what is considered righteous or wicked by finite humans changes with time.

b. Do You Think You Are More Right Than God?

"Do you say, 'My righteousness is more than God's '?"

2. (:3) What Does It Profit You to Do Good?

"For you say, 'What advantage will it be to You?

What profit shall I have, more than if I had sinned?"

3. (:4) Elihu Attempts to Answer

"I will answer you, And your friends with you."

B. (:5-8) Are You Asking the Right Questions?

1. (:5) How Can You Figure Out Why the Transcendent God Is Treating You This Way?

"Look at the heavens and see;

And behold the clouds-- they are higher than you."

L. M. Grant: "Do you think this is right? Do you say, *My righteousness is more than God's?* (v.2). This was very clearly what was implied in Job's words, for he had said he was righteous and God was remiss in His not recognising Job's righteousness. How careful we should be when we are tempted to complain, for we are saying in effect that God is not treating us rightly! Job had questioned if there was any advantage or profit in being righteous, more than if he had sinned (v.3), that is, he thought, "what is the use of being righteous if the results are not what I imagined thy should be?" How can a believer entertain such unbelieving thoughts?

Elihu answers this by directing Job's eyes to heaven. Just to observe the heavens should make anyone bow with awe at the greatness of the glory of God. Both the heavens and the clouds are "*higher than you.*" The obscurity caused by clouds should move us to realise that it is impossible for mere man to perceive why God deals as He does: His ways are hidden from human observation.

2. (:6-7) How Does Your Behavior Impact God?

a. (:6) Your Sins?

"If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him?

And if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?"

David Whitcomb: But a person's sin or righteousness also **effects God**. He is not a distant, uncaring spirit being. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all people. Therefore, everyone's sins **grieve God**. God hates all sin and even individual's sins. And God is glorified and caused to be praised when His people whom He has redeemed live righteously.

b. (:7) Your Righteousness?

*“If you are righteous, what do you give to Him?
Or what does He receive from your hand?”*

Elmer Smick: In answer to Job’s inconsistency (vv.4–8), Elihu claims it is God who gets no benefit from Job whether or not he does right. God is far too **transcendent** for humans to affect him by their little deeds. Job’s righteousness or lack of it affects only people like himself (v.8). . . To Elihu God is too **transcendent** to be either helped by righteousness (v.7) or hurt by sin (v.6). And this is further refined by alluding to two kinds of sin, omission (*h̄t* ‘) and commission (*pš* ‘), which can neither deprive God nor hurt him in any way.

David Clines: In the first part, Elihu takes up Job’s complaints,

- (a) that he is no better off than if he had sinned (v 3b) and
- (b) that there is no benefit in righteousness (v 3a).

There are two ways of reading Elihu’s response. Either, he regards Job’s first complaint as an impious statement, since it implies that God is not operating the principle of retributive justice, and thus that God is unjust. Naturally, if you say that God is unjust, it means that you think you are more just than God (v 2b). Or, Elihu is simply arguing that talk about my rights and my benefit is not how we should speak about justice: a truly pious person would not be so **self-centered**. Indeed, piety should not even be focused on the question of its value to God (vv 5–7). **The mark of true piety is whether it brings benefit to others**, while justice is not a matter of my getting what I deserve but of **others benefiting from my virtue**. This seems the preferable reading. . .

Right behavior, including justice, is in his view not a theological but a humanistic virtue. Job’s fixation on what is due to him neglects the **social dimension** of the practice of justice.

John Hartley: One’s righteous character cannot be presented as a gift to God. No amount of good works benefits God or puts him under obligation to anybody (cf. 22:2-3). There is nothing that God wants or needs from human hands. Since God is not dependent on human beings for anything, a person has no leverage with God.

3. (:8) How Does Your Behavior Impact Others?

*“Your wickedness is for a man like yourself,
And your righteousness is for a son of man.”*

Francis Andersen: Nothing that a man does either hurts or helps God; its repercussions are felt only among his fellow-men. This thought is so similar to the position that Elihu purports to be refuting, that there would seem to be something wrong, either with the text or with the usual interpretations. A solution will probably be found by tracing a closer connection between **verse 8** and **verses 2f**. The parallelism invites this, and the grammatical difficulties in **verse 8** might be helped out if it completes the statement begun there. As it is, Elihu seems to have finished up in a corner, affirming that **God is quite unaffected by human wickedness or righteousness**. If he is saying that God’s

intrinsic righteousness is perfect, not capable of being augmented by human goodness, not capable of being diminished by human wickedness, then the idea is a very abstract one, and an evasion. If it means that God couldn't care less about human conduct either way, then he is echoing the opinions quoted in **verses 6 and 7** and has undermined his whole case, saying in effect that justice means nothing to God. **Beginning with impartiality, he has ended with indifference.**

David Clines: From Elihu's point of view, Job has still a lot to learn about justice. Job has been worrying about the benefit (or rather, lack of benefit) to himself of his pious life, asking how he, in all his suffering, can possibly be better off than if he had been a great sinner. Elihu's significant move in this chapter is to open up the issue—as none of the friends nor Job has—of **the benefits of right living**. Job has been asking about the benefits to himself, and while Elihu does not negate Job's question, he is concerned rather with the **benefits of piety to God and to other humans**. In Elihu's view, the key point is that God does not benefit from human goodness (nor does he suffer because of human wickedness), but other mortals do. In so saying, Elihu is advocating an interestingly **utilitarian ethics** that, on the one hand, dispenses with the (theological) theory of retribution and, on the other, makes ethics not so much a duty toward God as **a duty toward one's fellow humans**. . .

If Elihu's doctrine were one of the impassivity of God to human actions, it would hardly be in accord with the program of the book of Job as a whole, in which God stands to gain or lose a great deal from the response of Job to his suffering. But it is not divine impassivity that Elihu is urging, nor does he imply a cosmology in which “the earthly domain is a self-contained universe where human actions are restricted in their influence to fellow humans in that world” (**Habel**). No, Elihu everywhere sees God as **actively involved with human affairs**, communicating with humans in various ways (**33:14**), delivering mortals from destruction (**33:29–30**), requiting evil (**34:11**), sustaining creaturely life (**34:14–15**), judging rulers (**34:17–19**), investigating wrongdoing (**34:21–22**), and visiting it with punishment (**34:25–28**). In what he says here his theme is that the justification of right behavior must be **its effects in the world of humans**, not its influence upon the divine, whom he represents as unharmed by human evil, unblessed by human goodness (note the interesting parallel in **Rom 11:35**).

II. (:9-16) QUESTION #2: WHY IS THERE NO ANSWER FROM GOD?

Tremper Longman: The second half of his speech in **chap. 35** attempts another argument. Elihu says that people suffer because, when they cry out in their suffering, they do not cry out for help to God. Thus **God ignores them** since they ignore him. In this speech, Elihu continues his attempt to paint Job's speeches as “*words heavy with ignorance*” (v. 16).

David Atkinson: He gives three quick reasons why prayer is not answered:

- pride (**35:12**);
- wrong motives (**35:13**);

- lack of faith (35:14).

This is all very worthy at the theoretical level, but Elihu is holding on to his theory at the expense of missing Job's predicament. None of these reasons counts for Job, for what matters to him is that from a clean heart he has sought the Lord, but so far he has always seemed to receive the stern reply, 'No answer.'

Elmer Smick: Another issue grows out of that last statement and centers around Job's concern over **God's apparent indifference** to the cries of the oppressed (cf. 24:1–12). Elihu maintains that God is not indifferent to people, but **people are indifferent to God**. People want God to save them; but they are not interested in honoring him as their Creator, Deliverer, and Source of wisdom (vv.9–11). Human arrogance keeps God from responding to the empty cry for help (vv.12–13). That is why God has not answered Job. The silence from God derives from Job's complaints, questions, and challenges that reveal the same kind of arrogance (vv.14–15). They are words without knowledge (v.16).

David Clines: In the second part (vv 9–16), Elihu explains **why God does not always answer cries for help**, and why therefore Job is not receiving any response to his case. When a sufferer remains unanswered by God, it is not because God is unjust, as Job alleges, but because there is **some fault in the person** who is calling for help. Those victimized by powerful oppressors may not be answered because they are proud or evil themselves (v 12) or because their cry is "*empty*" (v 13), whatever that means. Job too is not being answered, despite his conviction that he has laid his case before God and is awaiting a decision (v 14), because there is **something wrong with Job himself**—which Elihu does not further specify here. . .

The justice that Job seeks would lie in a response from God, justifying Job and declaring his innocence. It is agreed between Job and Elihu that such a response has not been forthcoming, and in this second phase of the speech, Elihu argues that the absence of a response from God does not mean, as Job thinks it does, that God cares nothing about what happens in the world of humans.

Peter Wallace: People cry out because of oppression, but their cries are selfish, proud, or empty – and yours, O Job, are worse!

Meredith Kline: God's transcendent immutability is not equivalent to **indifference** to human virtue and vice; it is not a distant disinterest in the multitudes who cry . . . *because of the pride of evil men* (v. 12), as Job had complained (cf. 24:12). Such prayer rather goes unheeded because God will not hear an *empty cry* (v. 13a, ASV), a mere animal cry (v. 11) for physical relief. . . It is not that God is indifferent to men but that men are indifferent to God. They do not seek God for God's sake, content to sing doxologies in the midst of desolation if only he be their portion.

A. (:9-12) What Are the Motivations of People Crying Out to God for Help?

Ray Stedman: **Why is God silent?** Men cry for help, but God knows that what they are

crying for is merely relief, that is all. They want to be taken out of the harmful, painful effects of their selfish ways and then allowed to go right back to being selfish. Nobody is concerned about God's glory and about being taught by God and learning at his hand and at his feet. Rather, they are simply crying out for deliverance, they want to use God, and to that kind of an appeal God is silent. I think this is why our prayers are often unanswered. Our selfishness has produced agony in our life and all we want is to escape the penalty; we are not at all concerned about God himself. And that is one reason for God's silence.

1. (:9) Does Oppression Require a Response from God?

*“Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out;
They cry for help because of the arm of the mighty.”*

David Clines: Being oppressed is no proof of innocence, says Elihu. . . the general point has a direct bearing on Job: Job is suffering, he allows, **but is he innocent?** Job is crying out, **but is he directing himself towards God?**

2. (:10-11) Are People Truly Seeking God for Who He Is?

*“But no one says, ‘Where is God my Maker,
Who gives songs in the night,
11 Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth,
And makes us wiser than the birds of the heavens?’”*

David Atkinson: There is, though, a further gem in this third speech of Elihu which we must not miss. It is a phrase of beauty and comfort. **Job 35:10** describes God as one ‘*who gives songs in the night*’. In the darkness, Elihu knows it is possible to sing the song of the Creator. Elihu himself so far seems a long way from showing Job how. But that is a phrase of great comfort for people searching for a hand in the darkness. The Creator God is one who ‘*gives songs in the night*’. May he give us grace so to know him in the darkensses we face that we may with joy be enabled to sing his songs.

David Clines: What these verses show is how Elihu thinks of God: though God is deeply involved in human affairs (see above on v 7), he is not primarily a savior but a creator (“*my Maker*”), who is the author and sustainer of life (e.g., with “*songs in the night*”) and a teacher (cf. **36:22** “*Who is a teacher like him?*”) whose blessings for humans are above all on the intellectual and cognitive plane (teaching and making wise, v 11). If you are in distress, he means to say, it would be **better to understand that distress than merely to escape from it**. The victims of oppression would find their prayers answered if they saw their suffering as a learning opportunity, first for endurance (“*songs in the night*”) and secondly for wisdom about its meaning as intended by God (“*teaches us,*” “*makes us wise*”). Simply to cry out in pain is to align oneself with the animals, who lack understanding.

E.S.P. Heavenor: The thought of God as a **Teacher**, intent on steering man through a rough and thorny maze of pain to a deeper experience of Himself, gives us an important

distinction between Elihu and the friends. For them, God appears more characteristically as a Sovereign or Judge.

L. M. Grant: Does God not teach us more than the beasts? Does He not give greater wisdom to man than to birds? (v.11). Yet beasts and birds are cared for by God's preserving mercy. Why does man not consider this and realise that he too is dependent on his Creator? In other words, since God has given greater understanding to men than to beasts and birds, **why do men not show it by relying on God?**

3. (:12) Are People Approaching God in Humility or in Pride?

*“There they cry out, but He does not answer
Because of the pride of evil men.”*

John Hartley: It is false to claim that God does not *hear* or *regard* these cries. The truth is that God cannot be coerced or pressured by such pleas into acting in any set way. God's apparent silence indicates that there is some fault in those making the petition, not in God.

B. (:13-16) How Should You Respond When God Is Silent?

1. (:13-14) Is Something Wrong with Your Approach to God?

a. (:13) Is Your Cry Empty and Faithless?

*“Surely God will not listen to an empty cry,
Nor will the Almighty regard it.”*

b. (:14) Are You Waiting Patiently for God to Respond?

*“How much less when you say you do not behold Him,
The case is before Him, and you must wait for Him!”*

David Clines: What is the connection of vv 14–15 with what precedes? It seems to be that if God does not respond to the misery of the oppressed merely because they have omitted to address themselves explicitly to him (vv 9–13), “*how much less*” can Job expect to be heard when he treats God with insolence and denigrates his governance of the world (vv 14–15).

John Hartley: Elihu exhorts that the proper attitude that he should have is to *wait* for God.

Warren Wiersbe: Elihu dismisses Job's complaint that he can't see God. The important thing is that God sees Job and knows his case completely (**Job 35:14**). Job's situation won't be changed by his empty talk and many words (v. 16), so the only thing for Job to do is **wait** and **trust** (v. 14).

2. (:15-16) Are You Lashing Out with Verbal Retorts?

*“And now, because He has not visited in His anger,
Nor has He acknowledged transgression well,*

*So Job opens his mouth empty;
He multiplies words without knowledge.”*

Roy Zuck: Elihu felt that Job could not be cleared by God (**35:2**) as long as he questioned the value of serving Him (**v. 3**) and prayed from a heart of pride (**v. 12**), while thinking that God does nothing about wickedness (**v. 15**).

Francis Andersen: Since **verse 15** is quite obscure, we are left to guess that it means that Elihu is accusing Job of completely misunderstanding God’s **unresponsiveness** as **heedlessness**, whereas in fact God is holding His anger in. Job is guilty of despising God’s **longsuffering**.

John MacArthur: Elihu suggested that although Job had suffered, his suffering was not the fullness of God’s anger or He would have punished Job more for the sinfulness of his speeches. He thought God had actually overlooked the folly of Job in his useless words.

Elmer Smick: Job might not be wicked, but he shares this **arrogance** and so gets no answer (**v.14**). Elihu seems offended by the idea that Job should consider himself a litigant at God’s court. With his multiplicity of empty words, Job should not expect to be heard (**vv.14–16**). Even worse is Job’s rebellious spirit chiding God for hiding his face (**13:24; 23:3**; cf. **v.14**) and seeking to march into his presence as an impatient litigant (**13:15; 31:35–37**). And now, with his case before God, Job dares to complain about waiting for an answer (**30:20**; cf. **v.14c–d**) and continues to accuse God of injustice (**21:4; 24:1–12**; cf. **v.15**).

John Hartley: Elihu is less concerned to prove that Job has committed some hidden sin that has led to his plight than to show that Job’s asseverations of innocence and his charges against God are presumptuous folly. While he has made Job appear to be more arrogant than he really has been, he helps Job reflect on the presumptuous nature of his bold claims. In this manner he prepares Job for the possibility that he might have to surrender his avowal of innocence when God addresses him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do we ever think that we are right and God is wrong?
- 2) How does our sin impact God?
- 3) How do you counsel yourself when you are tempted to believe that it doesn’t really matter whether or not you obey God?
- 4) What encouragements do we have to wait patiently in those times when God seems to be silent?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Francis Andersen: His reply (9–16) to the second problem is equally callous. The question is, ‘**Why doesn’t God answer prayer?**’ In particular, ‘Why has he not heeded Job’s sustained appeals for some kind of response, any kind of response?’

It is always possible to think of a reason for unanswered prayer. The **trite explanation**, which we hear all too often, is that

- ‘You didn’t have enough faith’, or
- ‘You prayed from the wrong motive’, or
- ‘You must have some hidden, unconfessed sin’.

This diagnosis is always applicable.

- Everyone who prays is aware of the weakness of his faith;
- everyone with a scrap of self-knowledge knows that his motives are always mixed;
- everyone who searches his conscience can find no end of fresh sins to be dealt with.

If no prayers could be offered and none answered, until all these conditions were satisfied, none would ever be offered and none answered. The Elihus of this world do not care about the cruelty of their perfectionist advice and its unreality. Their theory is saved; that is what matters.

We notice that, by taking this line, Elihu has changed the focus from the multitude of oppressions (9a) which should arouse the anger of a just God, irrespective of the spirituality of those who call for help. According to Elihu, **the suppliants disqualify themselves** by defects of their own. In his universe, answers to prayer are just as automatic as judgments on the wicked, provided the conditions are satisfied. God does not hear an *empty cry* (13a). The word *empty* implies a vain, indeed profane, prayer. In **verse 12**, then, the *pride* of evil men probably describes the wrong attitude of the person praying and the reason why God does not answer, rather than the reason why they cry out. This prepares the way for accusing Job of such pride in **verses 14f**. In **verses 10 and 11** Elihu does suggest a suitable prayer, which, however, the oppressed are not willing to use. Just why such a prayer should be effective is not clear. As a plea for justice, it is surprising that God is addressed as my *Maker*, not Judge or Saviour. And the **attributes of God**, for all their expressions of appreciation, do not seem as pertinent as appeals to his power or justice. **Man’s superiority to brute creation** is a key thought in Job, and it is remarkable that Elihu uses it here. To remind God of one’s capacity to receive divine instruction is evidently not the kind of pride that ruins prayer.

What Elihu seems to be leading up to is a stern denunciation of Job’s prayers as abundant but **ignorant** (16b). He applies to them the epithet *empty*, which Job has applied to the friends. Since **verse 15** is quite obscure, we are left to guess that it means that Elihu is accusing Job of completely misunderstanding God’s unresponsiveness as

heedlessness, whereas in fact God is holding his anger in. Job is guilty of despising God's longsuffering (**Rom. 2:4**, AV). **Verse 14** suggests that it is Job's posture as a litigant that Elihu finds objectionable, and a barrier rather than a means of access to God. To complain that you do not see him is an impertinence, when the fault lies with Job. Elihu, who thinks that he is '*perfect in knowledge*' (**36:4**), has a manageable, predictable God. Job, all too conscious of the sovereign freedom of the Lord, lives in the suspense of faith, praying without guarantees.

David Atkinson: Elihu so far seems to have a God who is **manageable** and **predictable**, whom he can understand. God's ways are clear to him. Everything is **under control**. But if we have learned anything so far from the book of Job, it is that reality is much less clear, manageable and predictable than we would like to think. The divine wisdom, we are realizing, is not merely something that we can get if we think hard enough, or behave well enough, or if our theological system is coherent, tidy and clear. The divine wisdom, as we shall see, comes by way of **the storm** and **the whirlwind**.

In a phrase from a poem by **Professor Frances Young**, 'wisdom' takes on another aspect. 'Wisdom' is the '**wild order of things**'. The poem is called '*Sophie's call*' (echoing deliberately the Greek word for wisdom, *sōphia*). It is a long poem; this is just a part of it:

*In a night of loss comes Sophie's call.
Visions in a dark night of passion and loss.
She appears lovely in her element.
I see her as the **wild order of things**.
Her beauty is the strain of a mountain stream.
Filling the conscious mind with unconscious tone
Intoning the tones of grey-green clouds and rocks
Older than ever ancient sages dreamed.
Sophie's eyes are deep pools of love.
Aged with wisdom, yet dancing with glistening spray,
As catching the droplets of light, her youthful hair
Is tossed in the breeze....*

*This wild beauty I see at the heart of things;
Conceived in the mind of the unknown Ancient of Days
She is the elemental principle,
The underlying pattern beneath the chaos....*

*'I am Sophie, the **wild order of things**.'...*

There is a **wildness** to the divine ordering of things which the Elihus of this world cannot stand. Elihu cannot bear very much reality. **C. S. Lewis** makes a similar point when Mr Beaver points out that Asian is not a tame lion:

Mr. Beaver had warned them. 'He'll be coming and going,' he had said. 'One day you'll see him and another you won't. He doesn't like being tied down – and of course he has other countries to attend to. It's quite all right. He'll often drop in. Only you mustn't press him. He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.

Elihu's God is too tidy and too small.

David Thompson: On August 8, 1529, the famed reformer Martin Luther and his wife were very sick with a dysentery fever. At the same time Luther also had terrible trouble with his sciatic nerve. When he and his wife were going through this, he wrote these words: “God has touched me sorely, and I have been impatient: but God knows better than we whereto it serves. Our Lord God is like a printer, who sets the letters backwards, so that here we must so read them; when we are printed off, yonder, in the life to come, we shall read all clear and straightforward. Meantime we must have patience. Tribulation is a right school” (*Table Talk*, p. 288).

Martin Luther learned to use personal troubles, trials and tragedies as a means of developing his relationship with God. In moments of trouble and trial, he turned to God. He learned patience and perseverance and even though there were some things he never did understand in this life, he knew he would in the next. Frankly, we need to learn the same lesson and the fact is we rarely do learn it. . .

WHEN GOD PERMITS TERRIBLE, NEGATIVE THINGS TO HAPPEN TO US AND WE HAVE NOT DONE ANYTHING TO DESERVE IT, HE IS TRYING TO DEVELOP OUR **PATIENCE**; SO THE WISEST THING FOR US TO DO IS NOT TO QUESTION OR CRITICIZE GOD, BUT TO QUIETLY **WAIT** FOR GOD'S DELIVERANCE.

There are nine themes that Elihu develops in this text:

- It is not just to ever think or say that our righteousness is more than God's. **35:2**
- It is not right, in trials, to say one may as well live a life of sin. **35:3**
- Man is in no position to question or criticize God, because God's ways and work are much higher than man. **35:5**
- Man does not affect God's program by his sin or by his righteousness; he affects himself and others. **35:6-8**
- The majority of people, when being oppressed, cry out for help. **35:9**
- The majority of people do not cry out to the personal God. **35:10-11**
- The majority of people who cry to God will not be answered. **35:12-13**

- God will not answer the prayers of His people who say negative things against Him. **35:14a**
- God wants His people to patiently wait on Him. **35:14b**

Matthew Henry: Job being still silent, Elihu follows his blow, and here, a third time, undertakes to show him that he had spoken amiss, and ought to recant. Three improper sayings he here charges him with, and returns answer to them distinctly:

I. He had represented religion as an indifferent unprofitable thing, which God enjoins for his own sake, not for ours; Elihu evinces the contrary, **ver 1-8**.

II. He had complained of God as deaf to the cries of the oppressed, against which imputation Elihu here justifies God, **ver 9-13**.

III. He had despaired of the return of God's favour to him, because it was so long deferred, but Elihu shows him the true cause of the delay, **ver 14-16**.

TEXT: Job 36:1 – 37:24

TITLE: ELIHU'S FOURTH SPEECH: NOT WHY DO YOU SUFFER BUT WHAT CAN YOU LEARN

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM AS DISPLAYED IN NATURE REINFORCE HIS JUSTICE AND USE OF AFFLICTION FOR DISCIPLINE TO RECOVER THE WAYWARD RIGHTEOUS

INTRODUCTION:

David Clines:

- Part 1 is introduced by the topic sentence “*to ascribe justice to my Maker,*”
- Part 2 by “*Who is a teacher like him?*”

The **genre** of the speech is a mixture of **wisdom instruction** and **admonition**. Unlike Elihu's previous speech, which was predominantly disputation, with only a single sentence of wisdom instruction, this speech is very largely instruction, with occasional elements of warning and advice. . .

There are **two nodal verses** in this speech, reflecting its twin concerns: **Job 36:3** “*I will range far and wide for knowledge to ascribe justice to my Maker*” headlines the material of the first Part of the speech (**36:2–25**), while **Job 36:22** “*Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?*” enshrines the dual themes of the instruction on the phenomena of nature:

- God's power, to which Job's response should be wonder, and
- God's teaching conveyed through nature.

Elmer Smick: 36:23-26 -- Elihu considers God's **power** and **wisdom** as the themes Job should dwell on rather than God's **justice**. The wisdom of the great Teacher (cf. **34:32; 35:11**) assures the justice of his actions, and his power makes certain his wise purposes will be fulfilled. God's ways derive from his sovereign freedom (**v.23a**), thus ruling out people's right to question God's moral conduct (**v.23b**). Because mortals see God's work at a great distance, they cannot understand it completely; so those who are wise will look on it with delight and praise (**v.24**). Elihu is here preparing the way for the theophany when Job will finally see his sovereign Lord and learn about his dominion. In **v.26** Elihu is not saying that we cannot know God (NEB, RSV) but that we cannot fully understand his greatness.

John Hartley: In a more compassionate tone Elihu returns to the theme of God's **disciplinary use of suffering**. He teaches that God protectively watches the righteous. If they commit a transgression, he lets them know what they have done wrong, often using the cords of affliction to instruct them. If they respond to his rod of discipline, they will be **restored** and behold the divine splendor in awe. But if they persist in their

transgression, they will die. After warning Job, Elihu focuses on God's glory that is revealed in a thunderstorm.

Francis Andersen: Elihu's last word falls into two parts so distinct in tone and content as to give the impression that they are independent compositions and could have been separate speeches. The first section (36:1–21) continues the themes of the preceding chapters. The second (36:22–37:24) introduces a new line of argument. It begins to move in the direction of the Lord's speeches that follow and so serves as a transition to the concluding cycle (chapters 38–42).

David Atkinson: Now in chapters 36 to 37 Elihu is turned towards God, and the tone is softer; the pastoral sensitivity returns, and we are given not only the best statement so far of the theology of rewards and punishments, but important **new insights** as well. There are some more gems here.

In the book of Job, these chapters form a **bridge** between the world of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and the word of the Lord from the whirlwind. They soften us, prepare us, and begin to show us what an encounter with the Lord will be like.

(36:1) PROLOGUE – ELIHU'S FOURTH SPEECH

"Then Elihu continued and said,"

(36:2-4) INTRODUCTION – THE CREDIBILITY OF THE SPEAKER

Elmer Smick: Here, still full of words, he wants Job to become aware of his credentials as God's messenger (vv.1–4).

A. (:2) Speaking on Behalf of God

*"Wait for me a little, and I will show you
That there is yet more to be said in God's behalf."*

John Hartley: Elihu again entreats his audience, particularly Job, to *be patient* with him while he defends God. He is confident that he can offer Job more insight into God's ways.

B. (:3) Speaking in Inspired Support of God in Defense of His Justice

*"I will fetch my knowledge from afar,
And I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker."*

Tremper Longman: 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.

David Clines: Why does Elihu here refer to God as his “*Maker*”? . . . It must be that he views right behavior and the practice of justice as a fundamental part of the world order, set up at creation by its author.

John Hartley: Elihu insists that *his knowledge* may be trusted, for it has come *from afar*, the distant place where God dwells. The **source** of one’s wisdom was assumed to ensure its validity. So here, as in **ch. 32**, Elihu claims that his words are inspired. He also states that it is his intent to *demonstrate* that God, his *Maker* (*po’el*), acts rightly. He feels compelled to defend God’s integrity before Job’s complaint.

C. (:4) Speaking in Sincerity and Truth with Absolute Knowledge

*“For truly my words are not false;
One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.”*

John Hartley: He speaks confidently, for he possesses comprehensive knowledge (*de’ot*). The plural form of *de’a*, “*knowledge*,” means “*full knowledge*,” knowledge characterized as perfect, pure, or complete (*tamim*). Such knowledge is beyond contradiction or rebuttal.

I. (36:5-25) THE JUSTICE OF GOD DISCIPLINES THE WAYWARD RIGHTEOUS VIA AFFLICTION TO ATTEMPT TO RECOVER THEM

David Atkinson: **vv. 5-12** -- Elihu begins by repeating the thought that though God sends trouble, he is just and merciful (**36:6**). God protectively watches over the righteous (**36:7**). Elihu recognizes at last the pain of being caught in the ‘*cords of affliction*’ (**36:8**). He outlines the conventional wisdom: ‘*If they obey and serve him: prosperity; if they do not listen: they perish and die*’ (cf. **36:11-12**).

Tremper Longman: After another rather pompous introduction, Elihu launches into his argument, which turns out to be a rehash of the **retribution theology** that all the characters have been putting forward. **God takes care of the innocent and punishes the wicked.**

Verses 8–12 return to the theme of **disciplinary suffering**. That is, God makes people suffer in order to teach them a lesson.

David Clines: **vv. 5-15** -- The theme of this section is how God treats those among the righteous who do wrong in comparison with how he treats those who are really wicked. The fate of the wicked, that they are not kept alive (**6a**) but die in youth (**14**), more or less frames the depiction of the righteous who fall into sin (**7–12, 15**). Because they are righteous, they are watched over by God (**7a**) and raised to positions of importance (**7bc**). But if they subsequently find themselves in an unhappy state (**8**), that will be for a reason, and God will tell them what the reason is (**9**) and instruct them in what they must do to escape from their misery (**10**). If they comply, they are restored to happiness

(11), but if they do not they die in ignorance (12)—as if they were godless from the start. The wicked, on the other hand, do not appeal to God for deliverance from their misery (13), and their fate is to die young, in shame (14). The righteous, by comparison, receive instruction when they are suffering, and so find deliverance from their suffering (15). These generalizations will be followed by an address to Job personally in vv 16–21.

The point of the comparison of righteous and wicked at this moment in Elihu’s speech seems to be a further **justification of God** and **proof that he is righteous** in all that he does—which Elihu has proclaimed as the purpose of the speech (v 3b). Although he does not affirm explicitly in these verses that God is just, his purpose seems to be much more than simply to sketch the varying fates of the two classes of people: the way they are treated is for him further evidence of the outworking of the justice of God in human affairs. . .

It is much better to see the contrast in vv 5–16 as between the truly righteous who fall into sin and may or may not escape, and the truly wicked who come to an early grave. .

He transcends the old distinction between the righteous and wicked that is the staple of the wisdom and psalmic literature and that constrains the thinking of the other friends. Eliphaz, it is true, has allowed that the innocent never suffer permanently, and that Job’s calamity must therefore be short-lived (4:3–6), but it is Elihu’s special contribution to have thought through a whole philosophy of God’s treatment of those among the righteous who find themselves in the toils of suffering because of their wrongdoing. If they are bound with fetters, he says, God declares their transgression to them, and opens their ear to instruction. At that point, two roads open up before them: either they can hearken, in which case they complete their days in prosperity, or else they fail to hearken and they must cross the river of death (36:8–12). This recognition that even the righteous can fall into sin is of course a much more realistic view of human nature than the old bipolar structure that made a sharp division between the righteous and the wicked.

A. (:5-7) The Power of God Enforces Divine Justice

1. (:5) God’s Power in Justice Does Not Compromise God’s Compassion

*“Behold, God is mighty but does not despise any;
He is mighty in strength of understanding.”*

Warren Wiersbe: The fact that God is great and mighty does not mean that He ignores man or has no concern for individuals. . . Job thought that God was ignoring him, but God keeps His eyes on the righteous (v. 7; **1 Peter 3:12**) and eventually transforms their circumstances.

2. (:6) God’s Power in Justice Terminates the Wicked But Delivers the Afflicted

*“He does not keep the wicked alive,
But gives justice to the afflicted.”*

David Clines: The afflicted who have their “*right*” asserted are those who, being righteous, fall into sin but learn from their suffering and so in some sense deserve their deliverance.

John Hartley: vv. 5-6 – Elihu states his premise forthrightly: God, who is *mighty in strength*, punishes the wicked and defends the just. Since no person can threaten him, he never governs capriciously or out of fear. Assuredly he would never *despise* or treat lightly the *pure of heart*. On the other hand, God does not continue to support the life of the wicked so that they may prosper indefinitely in spite of their evil ways. In the proper time he judges them and terminates their success. . . Moreover, God *gives justice to the afflicted* by delivering them from their affliction. There can be no question that God is a God of compassionate justice.

3. (:7) God’s Power in Justice Can Elevate the Righteous to Positions of Authority (Transform Their Circumstances)

*“He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous;
But with kings on the throne
He has seated them forever,
and they are exalted.”*

Elmer Smick: First Elihu presents his premise that God is mighty and firm of purpose (v.5). That purpose is stated: God will not grant life to the wicked but always grants the rights of those who are wronged (v.6). He then proceeds to tell how that purpose is carried out (vv.6–10). No matter what life may bring, whether chains or affliction, God never takes his eyes off the righteous but uses their troubles to give disciplinary instruction and to call them to repentance (vv.7–10). Responding to his call determines the course of a person’s life and his fate—obey and live under his blessing; disobey and die in bitter resentment (vv.11–14).

John Hartley: Elihu accentuates the compassionate way God treats the righteous. . . he continually observes them to protect and bless them. In due time he exalts them . . . Perhaps Elihu is alluding to the theme, beloved in Wisdom literature, of the poor, afflicted, righteous person who rises to a prominent place of leadership (see, e.g., the story of Joseph, Gen. 37; 39-50 and Eccl. 4:14).

B. (:8-12) Divine Justice Afflicts the Wayward Righteous for a Purpose

1. (:8-9) Fall of the Righteous into Affliction Due to Transgressions

a. (:8) Consequence of Affliction

*“And if they are bound in fetters,
And are caught in the cords of affliction,”*

John Hartley: God curtails their movement *with cords of affliction* (‘*oni*). The chains not only keep them from traveling further down a wrong road, but they also inflict pain to make the errant conscious of the impending doom that lies at the end of the wayward path they have taken. After binding them, God *tells them what they have done*. He

makes them aware that *they have acted arrogantly*. Whereas pride blinds their conscience, God seeks to bring them to their senses so that they might turn from their evil course. Moved by mercy he reveals to them *their transgressions*.

- b. (:9) Caused by Transgression
 *“Then He declares to them their work
 And their transgressions,
 that they have magnified themselves.”*

2. (:10-12) Fate of the Fallen Righteous

- a. (:10) Call of the Fallen Righteous to Repentance
 *“And He opens their ear to instruction,
 And commands that they return from evil.”*

Elmer Smick: The key word in this passage is *mûsār* (“*correction*”) in v.10. As a wisdom word used often in Proverbs (1:2–3, 8; 3:11; 4:13; 5:12, 23; 6:23; 8:10, 33; et al.), it includes all that God does to teach human beings his wisdom by means of his commandments (v.10b) or by circumstances (v.8). God’s unfainting purpose is to reach the hearts of people, if necessary by “*cords of affliction*” (v.8b). In v.10 he makes them “*listen* [Heb., ‘*uncovers their ears*’] to *correction*,” or perhaps “*by the correction*”; that is, he gets their attention and then calls for repentance.

John Hartley: It is through **discipline** then that God seeks to move any of the righteous who have sinned to forsake their wrongful ways and to serve him faithfully again.

- b. (:11-12) Contrast in Response of the Righteous
 - 1) (:11) Those Who Repent and Are Restored to Prosperity
 *“If they hear and serve Him,
 They shall end their days in prosperity,
 And their years in pleasures.”*
 - 2) (:12) Those Who Rebel and Perish Without Knowledge
 *“But if they do not hear,
 they shall perish by the sword,
 And they shall die without knowledge.”*

Roy Zuck: A godly sufferer, Elihu suggested, who will listen to God and will once again *obey and serve Him* will then prosper and enjoy *contentment*. Learning from suffering and turning from pride was Elihu’s point earlier (33:23-28). This sounds like the theology of the three, but they stressed that Job was guilty of sinful actions whereas Elihu was concerned more with Job’s sinful attitude of pride. . . Job should not think of his calamities as proof that he was essentially ungodly (the view of the three agitators) or as evidence that God had forsaken him (as Job maintained). Instead he should see his afflictions as a means of helping him become humble before God.

C. (:13-15) The Contrast between the Fate of the Unrepentant Wicked and the Wayward Righteous Who Listen and Repent

David Clines: A further contrast is drawn here, between the ultimate fate of the godless (vv 12–14) and that of the afflicted (v 15). It is the same contrast as we saw in v 6, between the fates of the wicked and of the afflicted. It is not at all the same contrast that has occupied us from v 7 to v 12, which was between two kinds of righteous people:

- those who respond to the message contained in their affliction (v 11) and
- those who do not (v 12).

1. (:13-14) The Fate of the Unrepentant Wicked

a. (:13a) Objects of Divine Wrath

“But the godless in heart lay up anger;”

David Clines: Perhaps it means that they are forever increasing the store of divine anger that is due to them. Less probably, they harbor the anger roused in them by their suffering (**Habel**), cherishing angry thoughts about God’s discipline (**Peake**).

b. (:13b) Oblivious to Their Need for Divine Deliverance

“They do not cry for help when He binds them.”

c. (:14a) Die Prematurely

“They die in youth,”

d. (:14b) Perish in Shame

“And their life perishes among the cult prostitutes.”

Francis Andersen: These verses complete the sketch of the person who refuses to pray when in trouble (**13b**). He comes to an untimely (**14a**) and shameful (**14b**) end. The word translated **shame** means ‘*male prostitutes*’ (NEB), but it is hard to see what such an allusion is doing in the present passage.

David Clines: Some have thought that there is a closer connection between the two cola of the verse: if in the first colon the wicked die “*in their youth*,” in the second colon dying “*among the prostitutes*” should perhaps also refer to an **early death**. “These male devotees to unchastity,” say **Driver-Gray**, “. . . must, worn out by their excesses, have died, as a rule, at an early age, so that they became proverbial as victims of an untimely death” (similarly **Peake**). “It is likely that sexually transmitted diseases claimed the lives of many, then as now” (**Alden**). There is, however, not a shred of evidence for these beliefs.

2. (:15) The Fate of the Wayward Righteous Who Listen and Repent

*“He delivers the afflicted in their affliction,
And opens their ear in time of oppression.”*

John Hartley: In summary Elihu reaffirms that God's purpose in using the discipline of pain is to turn the *afflicted through their affliction*. He increases their *tribulation* in order *to open their ears* to his speaking. His purpose is to lead them into the blessings he has prepared for them. God then is mankind's most patient, compassionate, and persistent teacher.

David Clines: "*the afflicted*" -- The term (already in **24:4, 9, 14; 29:12**; used by Elihu in **34:28; 36:6**) refers to any oppressed, that is, underprivileged, persons in Israelite society; they are of course typically the economically poor, but they include other types of oppressed persons, such as the chronically ill and prisoners.

David Atkinson: This is not simply saying again that God uses suffering to chasten and to bring to repentance. It is saying much more. Elihu is here recognizing that through the very process of affliction, there can be deliverance. There can be, in the title of **Martin Israel's** book, '*the pain that heals*'. It is through the suffering of God's servant that there can be healing. . .

God's dealings with us, though painful, says Elihu, are for healing. God is compassionate, luring us back into his ways, opening our eyes to a **new world**, opening our ears to new voices and new songs. He is pointing to a theme picked up by **Martin Israel** when he says: 'It is one of the fundamental contributions of pain to make people wake up to a **deeper quality of existence** and to seek evidence for meaning in their lives beyond the immediate sensations that arrest their attention.'

Elmer Smick: It is time for Job to see the **hand of God** in his suffering. God uses affliction to amplify his voice and thus obtain the attention of people (**v.15**). Job must understand that God is wooing him from the jaws of adversity, from slavery and oppression to freedom and comfort (**vv.16–17**).

D. (:16-21) Danger Zone – Warning to the Wayward Righteous to Repent

1. (:16) Danger of Rejecting Opportunities for Deliverance

*"Then indeed, He enticed you from the mouth of distress,
Instead of it, a broad place with no constraint;
And that which was set on your table was full of fatness."*

David Clines: There is no reason, however, why Elihu should be offering Job encouragement at this point; his purpose rather is to warn Job to accept the instruction being given him by God through his suffering.

More attractive is the interpretation of RV, which took **v 16** as a depiction of where Job could be now if he had heeded the divine advice: "*Yea, he would have led thee away out of distress into a broad place, where there is no straitness. . . . [17] But thou art full of the judgement of the wicked.*"

2. (:17) Danger of Divine Judgment Multiplying

*“But you were full of judgment on the wicked;
Judgment and justice take hold of you.”*

David Clines: But now Job finds himself in the position of the wicked, being punished by God. He is “*full of the judgment due to the wicked*,” and the justice that comes to the wicked has fallen upon him. **What is he to do?** Certainly not what he has been doing, complaining about the injustice of his suffering. Far from it; he has before him an opportunity to discover God’s instruction and so to be restored to prosperity and happiness (v 11). But it is a risky situation to be in, for Job can so easily let his suffering lead him further away from God: that very judgment that God intends as warning and instruction can become “*mockery*”, the occasion for insult of God. Job is all too capable of thinking too highly of himself, and his wealthy lifestyle has to be considered a real hindrance to a humble piety.

3. (:18-19) Danger of Prosperity Preventing Repentance

*“Beware lest wrath entice you to scoffing;
And do not let the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.
Will your riches keep you from distress,
Or all the forces of your strength?”*

David Clines: Continuing the thought of v 18, Elihu advises Job that there is no escaping the divine justice. Job’s wealth will never keep him from the “*distress*” of divine punishment, nor will any strenuous “*effort*” he might make to resist it.

4. (:20) Danger of Viewing Death as an Escape

*“Do not long for the night,
When people vanish in their place.”*

David Clines: This is a most difficult verse to make sense of in its context. **Gordis** explains persuasively that Elihu is warning Job “*not to hope for the shelter of night as do other evildoers* (cf., e.g., 24:13–17) *because whole nations are destroyed by God overnight* (cf. 34:20, 25).” That is to say, no more than in his wealth can Job find refuge from the divine reproof in the shadows of night; for the night is a dangerous time for individuals and nations alike.

John Hartley: Possibly then Elihu is countering Job’s longing to escape his suffering through a premature death by encouraging him to learn from his suffering.

Warren Wiersbe: The second danger was that Job might consider taking his own life (v. 20). “*The night*” and “*darkness*” are images of **death**, and Job often expressed a longing to die (3:1-9, 20-23; 7:21; 19:18-22). Many sufferers have committed suicide in order to escape their hopeless situations, but there was not much danger that Job would take this route. Job was a man of faith and was not about to go into God’s presence uninvited.

5. (:21) Danger of Continuing Down the Wrong Road

*“Be careful, do not turn to evil;
For you have preferred this to affliction.”*

Elmer Smick: There are few verses in the entire OT that are more difficult to translate than vv.17–20 in this chapter. The difficulty does not arise from the meaning of individual words but from the fact that they are so difficult to put together. The text may be disturbed, but more likely it is the rare meaning of key words that escapes us (see **Clines**, Job 21–37, 817–23, for the most extensive study of the philology of this section). The translations vary greatly. Most make it a sharp rebuke of Job (**Pope, JB, TEV**) for **being unjust and for misusing his power and wealth**.

Tremper Longman: In the final verse of this unit (v. 21), he charges Job with choosing iniquity rather than embracing the disciplinary lesson of his suffering. That is, Job chooses to charge God with wrongdoing rather than looking at his own life, recognizing his sin, repenting, and restoring his relationship with his God.

David Clines: Elihu summarizes his whole position on the meaning of Job’s present experience. In his suffering, Job has before him two possibilities, either to learn from the divine displeasure and come to enjoy God’s favor (as in v 11), or to remain stubbornly in the guilt that has brought down upon him divine punishment and so come to an early end (as in v 12). Job’s final fate has not been settled, and even at this juncture Job can decide to “turn” toward iniquity or away from it. It is for the sake of that very choice that Job has been brought into the affliction that now overwhelms him: *“that is why you are being tested, or, refined, by affliction.”*

E. (:22-25) Celebration of God’s Supremacy as He Exercises Power and Wisdom in Discipline

Elmer Smick: In v.22 Elihu completes his theme on God’s purpose in human suffering by returning to his original premise: **the greatness of God’s power and the uniqueness of his ways (vv.22–23)**. Indeed, his power guarantees his purposes, for in his sovereign freedom he has no one to whom he must give an account (v.23). He is also the **perfect teacher** who makes no mistakes. Job would do well to sit at the Master’s feet and learn that his hand never does wrong. Then Job will be prepared to extol God and his work (vv.24, 26).

Tremper Longman: vv. 22-33 -- He wants to emphasize God’s greatness in order to demonstrate to Job the **futility of trying to contend with him**. Elihu begins by simply stating that **God is exalted**. No one or thing is on his level. He asks **who is a teacher** like him, a rhetorical question that does not need to wait for a response. No one teaches like God. What is Elihu’s point? In the preceding sections, he has been making the argument that God teaches sinners through inflicting suffering on them. He teaches them that they are people who need to repent. Job, however, has not yet learned this lesson.

David Clines: Now the topic has changed to God, and we find in vv 22–25 a generalizing introduction to the **celebration of God in creation** that will run from v 26 to the end of **chap. 37**. Job is indeed addressed in the imperative “*remember*” of v 24, as he will also be included in the “*we*” of v 26 who are incapable of comprehending God, but the matters of Job’s choices, his complaints against God, and his sufferings have all disappeared.

Roy Zuck: Elihu then turned Job’s attention to God and spoke of His power (cf. v. 5; 37:23), instructional ability (cf. 36:9-10), independence (no one can tell God what to do by prescribing His ways), justice (no one can prove, as Job had tried to do, that God has ever done wrong; cf. 19:6-7), incomprehensible greatness (36:26), and eternity (v. 26). God’s years are innumerable and unending in contrast with man’s few years (9:25; 14:1-2, 5; 16:22). So in view of God’s perfections, Job ought to refrain from the sin of reproving God and ought to praise His great work, as other godly people have done, even in song.

1. (:22a) Supremacy of the Power of God
“*Behold, God is exalted in His power,*”

2. (:22b-23) Supremacy of the Wisdom of God
a. (:22b) No Instructor over God
“*Who is a teacher like Him?*”

David Clines: At first sight there are two unrelated topics in this verse: **the might** of God, and the fact that he is an **unrivalled teacher**. Both are great themes of Elihu, but what does he mean by putting them together in one sentence? It must be that **the power of God has some connection with his teaching**. And the connection may be suggested to be this: **every demonstration of the power of God is itself instruction**, every aspect of his ways in creation, for example, is itself pedagogy. For Elihu, God is not some heavenly dictator who runs the universe by remote control, but **humankind’s great Instructor who brings them enlightenment through every evidence of his working**.

b. (:23a) No Authority over God
“*Who has appointed Him His way,*”
c. (:23b) No Accountability over God
“*And who has said, 'Thou hast done wrong'?*”

David Clines: Whether in prospect or retrospect, God is not subject to direction or audit; that is the significance of these two rhetorical questions. No one gives him directions in advance on how to conduct himself; no one assesses his performance after the event.

3. (:24-25) Application: Extol God’s Awesome Works (His Power and Wisdom) Rather than Challenging His Justice and Discipline

*“Remember that you should exalt His work,
Of which men have sung.
25 All men have seen it;
Man beholds from afar.”*

Elmer Smick: vv. 22-26 -- The stanza has a chiastic pattern:

- A. God is great in power and a sovereign teacher (v.22).
- B. Human beings cannot prescribe his ways or judge his purpose (v.23).
- C. **Therefore praise him in song (v.24).**
- B'. Human beings see his power from afar (v.25).
- A'. God is great, beyond understanding (v.26).

John Hartley: Elihu exhorts Job to remember that he is to *extol* God's works. A mere man, he is to adopt an attitude of **praise toward God**, not a posture of **challenge**. He needs to sing the songs that people have sung, praising God's wondrous deeds. God has revealed his works in order that all humanity might behold the vistas of nature with a sense of wonder and joy. People are overwhelmed before the splendor of God's creative deeds, even though they view them from a far distance. When Job remembers to praise God, he will leave off his complaint. Then he will reap all the benefits of his suffering.

David Clines: How exactly would Job “*extol*” (hiph, “*declare to be great*”) God's work in creation? Presumably by joining the universal choir (**Terrien**), the singing of praise that is already going on (v 24b). Though there is no direct reference to the Hebrew psalms, hymns like **Pss 8, 19, 29, 65:6–13 (7–14), 104, 147, 148** would fit the description well. . . And why should Job now be extolling God's work, according to Elihu? Because to praise God's work requires one to become occupied with it, to research it and come to know it; if Job were to do that, he would **learn the lessons** that God, the **unrivaled teacher** (v 22b), has imprinted in the book of nature.

(36:26) TRANSITION – EXALTATION OF THE INSCRUTABLE ETERNAL GOD OF WISDOM

*“Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him;
The number of His years is unsearchable.”*

David Clines: One cannot be sure whether this verse **concludes the strophe** that began at v 22, with the same “*Behold, God,*” or whether it is the **start of the new strophe** that runs to v 33. Either way, it is another verse where the connection of its parts is not transparent. **How is God's greatness related to the “number of his years”?** . . . Now his age must be related to his **wisdom**. If God is infinitely old, he must also be infinitely wise (as also **de Wilde**, alone of modern commentators, recognizes). Ironically, Elihu has been at pains to assert that age is no assurance of wisdom (**32:9**), but the burden of tradition about the number of God's years is evidently more than he can throw off.

Wisdom is, in a traditional pedagogy, the principal attribute of a teacher, and for Elihu, it is **God's wisdom in creating and sustaining the world that is his greatness**,

and never simple power or might. The whole description of the natural world from here to the end of **chap. 37** can be seen as **focusing on the divine wisdom rather than divine strength**.

II. (36:27 – 37:20) GOD’S GREATNESS, POWER AND WISDOM REFLECTED IN NATURE FOR MAN TO CONTEMPLATE

Derek Kidner: It is important to note that each section of this hymn is introduced with a reference to God’s **incomprehensibility**:

- God is “*beyond our understanding*” (36:26);
- “*Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds . . .?*” (36:29);
- “*God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding*” (17:5).

The point which Elihu now wants to make is that if man cannot understand fully what God is doing in the natural world, neither can he understand fully what God is doing in our individual lives. Elihu is on good ground here. What he says in these verses prepares us for what is to come in the concluding chapters when God will speak to Job’s situation.

Warren Wiersbe: **God’s Mighty Power in Nature** – “*Behold, God is great, and we know Him not*” (36:26). This is the theme of the last part of Elihu’s speech; and he illustrated it with the works of God in nature, specifically, God’s control of His world during the seasons of the year.

- Autumn (36:27 – 37:5)
- Winter (vv. 6-10)
- Spring (vv. 11-13)
- Summer (vv. 14-18)

A. (36:27 – 37:5) See God in the Awesome Thunderstorm

Francis Andersen: Elihu first directs Job’s attention to the splendour of God in nature, in the storm (26–33). As the discourse continues, he will elaborate on what happens in winter (37:1–13) and on the beauty of the sky when the storm is over (37:14–24).

Elmer Smick: Elihu, at this point, is so overwhelmed by the greatness of God that he bursts forth into a **hymn of praise (36:27–37:13)**. Its theme is the **mystery of God’s ways in nature**. But Elihu’s real purpose is to impress Job with the **mystery of God’s ways in providence**. The two sometimes coincide (37:13). The hymn extols the work of God in the autumnal rain. It is his hand that distills the drops, pours out the moisture on earth, and thus provides for the needs of humanity (vv.27–28). With flashing lightning and the crash of his thunder, God ushers in the winter season with its drenching rain and driving winds, its ice and snow, so that humans and all God’s creatures see his power on display (vv.29–30).

1. (36:27-33) Demonstration of Control and Wisdom

Francis Andersen: The clouds and the rain display **God's astonishing control of the world** in operations of such delicacy and strength that men can neither understand nor imitate them. . . God's power in the thunderstorm is particularly terrifying, an expression of anger against iniquity (**33b**) and of judgment (**31a**). Yet it is also the means by which he gives food in abundance (**31b**). The one act of God can be **destructive and beneficent**.

Elmer Smick: God's **active greatness** in his creation is demonstrated by the **rain cycle**. Rain in the OT world was considered one of the most needed and obvious blessings of God. . .

The stanza on thunder (**36:33–37:5**) has a chiastic pattern:

- A. God's voice thunders (**36:33**).
- B. The terrifying sound of thunder (**37:1–2**).
- C. **God unleashes lightning (37:3).**
- B'. The majestic sound of thunder (**37:4**).
- A'. God's voice thunders (**37:5**).

a. (:27-28) Cycle of Rain Formation

*“For He draws up the drops of water,
They distill rain from the mist,
28 Which the clouds pour down,
They drip upon man abundantly.”*

David Clines: The production of rain must be among the least dramatic of the works of God in creation, but it is the example with which Elihu begins his account of the deeds of God that have been hymned in song (cf. v 24). It is a **creative work that is current, perpetual, beneficial for humans, even essential**. It is a **mysterious process** also, for it is obvious, to the ancients as well as to ourselves, that salt seawater is destructive while fresh rainwater is life-giving; how is the one changed into the other? We apparently have here an account of the complete cycle of rain formation,

- from the evaporation of water from the sea
- to the creation of clouds
- and the falling of rain from the clouds. . .

His conviction that the workings of the universe are a **channel of divine communication**: in casting his eye over the round of the seasons, he notices everywhere divine messages. Rainfall is God's gift of nourishment (**36:31**), thunder the declaration of his wrath (**36:33**). By winter storms he grants to mortals an opportunity to reflect on the divine activity (**37:7**), while the storm clouds may signify his correction of evil, his covenanted loyalty to humans, or his beneficence to the physical world he has created (**37:13**). All in all, meteorology is chock full of significance, a revelation of God's power (**36:22; 37:23**), a profusion of wonders (**37:5, 14**) from which humans may learn to fear the Almighty (**37:24**). Suffering, Elihu had said early

on, is a form of divine communication (33:19–28), as also are nightmares (33:15–18); now we find that **weather too is charged with theological meaning**.

John Hartley: Elihu meditates on the wondrous phenomenon of a raging thunderstorm. In a land marked by months without rain, the fall rains bring great joy as they relieve the fear of drought. On the steppe, where the horizon is visible for miles, the gathering and the movement of the clouds as a storm approaches is a spectacular sight. Just as amazing is the way that God empties the clouds by pouring down drops of water on the earth.

b. (:29) Transition – Beyond Human Comprehension

“Can anyone understand”

1) Rain Formation

“the spreading of the clouds,”

2) Phenomena of Thunder and Lightning

“The thundering of His pavilion?”

c. (:30-33) Phenomena of Thunder and Lightning

*“Behold, He spreads His lightning about Him,
And He covers the depths of the sea.*

31 For by these He judges peoples;

He gives food in abundance.

32 He covers His hands with the lightning,

And commands it to strike the mark.

33 Its noise declares His presence;

The cattle also, concerning what is coming up.”

2. (37:1-5) Demonstration of Majesty and Power

a. (:1) Response of Awe and Fear

*“At this also my heart trembles,
And leaps from its place.”*

Tremper Longman: In **37:1** Elihu confesses that a storm has the power to make his heart drop out of his chest. We have likely all had similar reactions to storms, whether they are thunderstorms or blizzards. The booming thunder, flashing lightning, and whipping winds make one want to run to a safe shelter. Elihu, though, takes the thought further: not only does it make one **stop in awe**, but it also **makes one think of God**. Indeed, according to 37:7, it is an indication of God’s presence through his handiwork. In a phrase, it **bears his stamp**.

John Hartley: Before this amazing display of God’s majestic power, Elihu’s heart trembles and leaps in excited apprehension. Awestruck at this display of God’s lordship, he exhorts his listeners to hearken well to God’s voice in the thunder. Before God, people should be fearful and submissive rather than bellicose and demanding.

b. (:2-5) Observation of Majesty and Power of God at Work

*“Listen closely to the thunder of His voice,
And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.
3 Under the whole heaven He lets it loose,
And His lightning to the ends of the earth.
4 After it, a voice roars;
He thunders with His majestic voice;
And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard.
5 God thunders with His voice wondrously,
Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.”*

Tremper Longman: The picture of God as in control of the storm continues from **36:22–33** into **chap. 37**. Elihu begins (**v. 1**) by describing his reaction to the storm. He is astonished and amazed. The power of the storm makes him realize just how strong God is. He becomes so excited that his heart beats wildly, almost falling out of this chest. **Verse 2** speaks of the thunder as the voice of God. This reminds us of **Ps. 29**, which pictures God as the power of the storm, commenting on his voice in a way that clearly relates it to thunder.

David Clines: **vs. 4** -- After the lightning comes **the thunder**, which is a token of God’s “majesty”. That term is often used with the pejorative sense of “pride” (e.g., **35:12; Ps 59:12 [13]; Prov 8:13**), but here it obviously has the positive sense of “majesty, excellence” (as at **40:10; Exod 15:7; Isa 60:15**).

B. (37:6-13) See God in Control of Chaotic Forces of Nature

1. (:6-8) Directing the Forces of Snow and Rain

David Clines: **vv. 5-8** -- This strophe concerns the snows and rains of winter, which water the earth (**v 6**), keep people indoors (**v 7**), and drive the animals to take refuge in their dens (**v 8**). These phenomena are on the one hand **mysterious**, “*great things that we cannot comprehend*,” and on the other a further communication of the divine, “*so that all may know his work*,” recognizing in the rhythms of nature the design of the creator.

a. (:6) Commanding the Snow and the Rain

*“For to the snow He says, ‘Fall on the earth,’
And to the downpour and the rain, ‘Be strong.’”*

Tremper Longman: **Verse 6** expresses his mastery over two types of storm: the **snowstorm** and the **rainstorm**. Both were known, but both were rare in this part of the world. Snow comes to the highlands only rarely, but when it does, it is a beautiful sight to behold. Rain also comes rarely, and while it can come with devastation, its life-giving waters are welcomed in this land of low precipitation.

b. (:7) Confining the Work of Men to Exalt His Working

*“He seals the hand of every man,
That all men may know His work.”*

Tremper Longman: to give something a **seal** might also be a way of providing a reminder of **ownership**, and that seems the best way to take the expression in this context. In other words, the snow and rain remind people of God’s work.

David Clines: The poet speaks of a world in which agricultural labor, not industry or home work, is the primary form of production. If it should cease, humans risk their livelihood. Yet even the capacity to work for a living is subject to the will of the deity, who may have other plans. The peasant farmer will reflect on that fact while he is **confined indoors**, yet not so much simply to acknowledge the greater power of God (as Fohrer) as perhaps to recognize that his interests and God’s do not necessarily coincide.

Sealing up the hand is an idiom for preventing a person from acting or working, as it was when God “*set a seal*” on the stars so that they would not shine (9:7). . . human activity can take place only when God releases human hands for work.

John Hartley: God uses the weather to restrict human and animal activity on earth. The cold, driving rains of winter shut people indoors. Animals, too, are forced to seek cover. Even the mightiest of beasts are confined to their lairs. Since these natural forces keep human beings from doing as they would like to do, they are made aware of a higher ruler who governs their destiny. That is, God reveals himself to human beings through his works such as the torrential rains.

c. (:8) Confining the Activity of Animals
*“Then the beast goes into its lair,
And remains in its den.”*

Tremper Longman: The snow and the rain also drive the wild animals into their lairs to seek refuge due to the storm’s power (v. 8). Perhaps the implicit message here is that the animals naturally know how to act when God brings a storm on the land, but Job does not react properly when God brings trouble into his.

David Clines: It is a nice touch that the animals too are depicted as locked up in their dwellings by the storms (it is not their winter hibernation, against **Rowley**). Their “*hand*” or activity also is “*sealed up*,” though v 7 thinks only of the humans’ cessation from their normal activity. The animals have no idea why they cannot go out hunting for food (some animals adapt to the cold by huddling together and keeping still to conserve energy); humans on the other hand are supposed to be reflecting on the significance of their enforced idleness for what God may be teaching them through it. Elihu would see it as another example of God “*teach[ing] us more than the beasts of the earth, mak[ing] us wiser than the birds of the heavens*” (35:11).

2. (:9-13) Directing the Forces of Powerful Storms

a. (:9-12a) Unleashing of Chaotic Events in Nature

*“Out of the south comes the storm,
And out of the north the cold.
10 From the breath of God ice is made,
And the expanse of the waters is frozen.
11 Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud;
He disperses the cloud of His lightning.
12 And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance,”*

b. (:12b-13) Reinforcing the Sovereignty of God

1) (:12b) Demonstration of God’s Control

*“That it may do whatever He commands it
On the face of the inhabited earth.”*

2) (:13) Fulfillment of God’s Purposes

*“Whether for correction,
or for His world,
Or for lovingkindness,
He causes it to happen.”*

David Atkinson: This is a picture of a world in which harsh things happen. By the breath of God, ice is given. It is a picture of the world in which Job is struggling. He has felt the force of the storm; he has heard the crashing of the thunder. He has been frozen by God’s ice.

But it is for **God’s purposes** – even of love – that God causes this to happen. The storm both disciplines and refreshes the land. Both discipline and refreshment are expressions of his **faithful, steadfast love**. ‘*He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love*’ (37:13).

John Hartley: The storm serves God’s purpose, for good or for ill. Skillfully God uses it as his rod of *discipline*, particularly if his people have been *disobedient*. Conversely, the rain is a great blessing as it drenches the thirsty ground so that the soil may yield its fruit. In that mode the storm is an expression of God’s faithful kindness or *mercy* (*hesed*) to his obedient people. The storm evidences that God governs the world wisely, i.e., both caringly and judiciously.

David Clines: Does Elihu mean that some clouds, with their rain, are sent for “correction” and others for “loyalty” and that we can know which is which? Or is it that there may be many reasons in God’s mind for sending rain, though we cannot know which is operative at any one moment? Probably the latter, since nowhere in these depictions of the seasons is the weather a means of discriminating between the righteous and the wicked.

Francis Andersen: Elihu draws two conclusions as men watch helplessly. God is in complete control of all these-events (12), even though their ‘*whirling around*’ might suggest aimless, chaotic forces. NEB brings this idea to clearer expression. Secondly

(13) he causes it to happen for any one of several quite diverse reasons. Three possibilities are mentioned, each introduced by ‘*if*’: ‘*if for rod, if for his earth, if for hesed* (the great word for covenanted loyalty, used in 10:12)’ . . .

These reasons for sending storms have to do with men, and have a moral justification along familiar lines: **to punish the wicked or to rescue the just**. The third reason is the most interesting, for it has nothing to do with men, and opens up a completely new line of thought. God does a great number of things in his vast universe which find no explanation by reference to mankind, just as the Lord’s own speeches will remind Job that he has many creatures besides men to look after. Sometimes he might have a storm, just ‘*for himself*’. . . **God is free to do what he pleases** without having to explain everything as part of his purpose for mankind.

Elmer Smick: Elihu sees a direct relationship between **God’s rule over nature** and his **dominion over the affairs of human beings** (v.13). He has already begun to anticipate the reasoning in the divine speeches. Critics claim this is evidence of the plagiarism of a later author. Others find it in keeping with what is evident all through the dialogue (**Andersen**, 266, n. 2). Still others see Elihu’s role as a divinely sent forerunner preparing the way for the theophany—a motif most notably expressed in **Isaiah 40:3–5** and **Malachi 4:5–6**.

Verse 13 is a thematic climax that lists ways God may use the storm. Elihu wants to do more than impress Job with **God’s power in nature**. Here he shows how the mystery of God’s ways in nature coincides with the mystery of his ways in providence. When God’s purpose is corrective, as punishment for the wicked (**Ps 18:11–19**), the storm is often connected with the deliverance of his people, thus demonstrating his *covenantal love* (*hesed*, v.13; cf. **Jos 10:11**; **1Sa 7:10–11**; **Ps 105:32–33**). God may also, however, demonstrate his covenantal love by sending the rain in season (**Dt 11:13–17**).

The opposite (drought) is in view in vv.17–18, and that has prompted the NIV to insert the word “*water*” into the phrase “*to his earth*” (v.13). The addition is not needed, for there appear to be **three totally different purposes** for the storm in v.13: to punish, to show his love, and for his own pleasure. The last anticipates a concept limited to the divine speeches (cf. **38:26**)—one that could be missed without careful attention. Some things that God performs have **no other explanation than that they please him**. Having arrived at this amazing point, Elihu is prepared to apply this truth to Job’s situation.

C. (37:14-20) Contemplate the Wonders of God in Nature and Make Application

David Clines: Unlike in the previous passages, the wonders of nature are here not portrayed as divine instruction to humans; they are simply “*wonders*,” as if there were nothing to be learned from them and they were only to be marveled at in silent adoration.

Francis Andersen: Elihu now addresses Job more directly by name. He launches into a **string of questions**, somewhat in the mode that the Lord himself will use when he eventually speaks. Reviewing once more the marvels of the sky, he asks Job if he knows how God does such things as balancing the clouds (16) and spreading out the heavens (18).

Elmer Smick: The questioning format anticipates the divine method in the upcoming speeches. Elihu wants Job to stop and think of **how absurd his position is**. Elihu asks him to supply knowledge he obviously does not have and is chided for his abysmal ignorance in the light of God's perfect knowledge (vv.15–16). **Verses 17–18** go together. Sweltering in the heat of the dry season with the sky like a brazen mirror, Job sits helpless. He cannot do anything about the weather but endure it. How then can a mere creature, so lacking in knowledge and strength, expect to understand God's justice (vv.19–20)? Elihu's switch to the first person in vv.19–20 may be an attempt to soften the blow on Job's ego. Has Job not drawn up his case, affixed his signature, and called for an audience with God?

Tremper Longman: Elihu now presses Job to consider the ramifications of his meteorological observations. He believes that they will get him to consider the “*wonders of God*” (v. 14). It is not as if Job does not recognize God's power. He does (see, for instance, 9:4–10). A recognition of God's power, though, has not convinced Job that God is acting justly toward him. It has only made him question whether he can get a fair hearing from a God who can strong-arm him.

Derek Kidner: Elihu asks a series of humbling questions (37:15–20) designed to underline in Job a sense of how small he is in comparison to God, who “*comes in awesome majesty*” (37:22). Certainly, part of Elihu's point is to underline the foolishness of disputing with God (37:19, 20, 24).

1. (:14-18) Asking the Tough Meteorological Questions to Humble Job

Elmer Smick: After this hymn Elihu asks Job a series of humbling questions about the **mysteries of nature** (37:14–18). If Job cannot understand how God performs these marvels, much less assist him, how then can he understand the far less obvious mysteries of God's providence (vv.19–20)?

- a. (:14) Consider the Wonders of God
“*Listen to this, O Job,
Stand and consider the wonders of God.*”
- b. (:15) Can You Explain how God Works?
“*Do you know how God establishes them,
And makes the lightning of His cloud to shine?*”
- c. (:16-17) Can You Control the Weather?
“*Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds,*

*The wonders of one perfect in knowledge,
17 You whose garments are hot,
When the land is still because of the south wind?"*

Francis Andersen: Man has absolutely no control over the weather, unlike God, who changes it at his will.

Tremper Longman: It is not just the cold that God produces and controls (as in the previous section), but also the heat. If cold comes from the north wind (v. 9), so heat comes from the south wind (v. 17).

d. (:18) Can You Spread Out the Skies?
*"Can you, with Him, spread out the skies,
Strong as a molten mirror?"*

Tremper Longman: Elihu asks Job if he can manufacture the sky like God did at the creation. The answer, of course, is no.

2. (:19-20) Applying the Wonders of God in Nature to Quell Any Disputes
*"Teach us what we shall say to Him;
We cannot arrange our case because of darkness.
20 Shall it be told Him that I would speak?
Or should a man say that he would be swallowed up?"*

Tremper Longman: Elihu believes that faced with the huge gap between human and divine ability and knowledge, Job will have no recourse but to back down from his challenge to God. Due to human ignorance, it would be utterly beyond Job or any human to speak to God ("we cannot arrange our thoughts in the darkness," v. 19b). Even if we speak, God will probably not hear a report of it (v. 20a). Job seems to have a death wish ("Did a person ever say that he wanted to be swallowed up?" v. 20b).

(37:21-24) EPILOGUE -- THE DIVINE SPLENDOR

Elmer Smick: Elihu shifts his attention from his moral application back to a **contemplation of the elements**. But it is only to make an even more forceful **moral application**. After the storm, with the clearing skies (v.21), comes the **sun in its brilliance**; likewise in golden splendor and awesome majesty God comes from his heavenly abode (*šāpôn*, "the north," v.22; cf. 26:7). Elihu admonishes Job that he needs to see God as God, almighty and morally perfect (v.23), and prove he is wise in heart by worshiping (fearing) him.

A. (:21) Blinding Brilliance of God

*"And now men do not see the light which is bright in the skies;
But the wind has passed and cleared them."*

Tremper Longman: If the sky is bright by means of the sun and impossible to see, how much more will the “*awesome splendor*” of God blind people.

B. (:22) Awesome Majesty of God

*“Out of the north comes golden splendor;
Around God is awesome majesty.”*

John Hartley: The new storm gathering in the north forebodes God’s majestic appearance. Intertwining the terms the *north* and the *storm*, both symbolic of a theophany, Elihu sees that God is about to appear from the glorious sunset. God, the sovereign Lord, is *clothed in awesome majesty*. The word *awesome* (*nora*’) emphasizes the terror that a display of the divine power arouses in earthly creatures, and the word *majesty* (*hod*) represents the splendor that attends the holiness of God.

C. (:23) Exalted Power and Justice of God

*“The Almighty-- we cannot find Him;
He is exalted in power;
And He will not do violence to justice and abundant righteousness.”*

John Hartley: In his appearing God remains far *beyond* human *reach*. Nevertheless, those who behold his coming sense his exalted *power* and his *justice*. These two qualities, power and justice, so often divided on earth, are inexorably bound together in God. *Great in righteousness*, Shaddai will never violate justice – he will not *oppress* the people capriciously. That is, when God reveals himself to Job, Job will be reduced to silence as God will convince him that he has been treated justly.

D. (:24) Response of Fear and Humility

*“Therefore men fear Him;
He does not regard any who are wise of heart.”*

Roy Zuck: Fearing God involves recognizing God’s supremacy and man’s inferiority because of his finiteness. Once again Elihu put his finger on Job’s problem – pride before God (cf. **33:17; 36:9**).

David Atkinson: Beginning with the traditional orthodoxy of the scribal schools, the law of retribution and reward, the narrow wisdom of the three friends, **Elihu has moved us on**. He has taken us from an exploration of God’s power, and a meditation on the greatness of God, through the storm, to his conclusion in **37:24**. The NIV reads: *‘Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?’*

Andersen’s translation may be better:

*Therefore men fear Him,
Surely all wise men of heart fear him.*

The fear of the Lord, that is where we have come to – and the fear of the Lord, as we learned earlier in **chapter 28**, is the beginning of wisdom.

David Clines: The theme of Elihu's speeches remains the forms of God's communication with humans, and God is still essentially the great Educator, whose aim it is to **instill wisdom** in his creatures. What they can learn about God is manifold, but, not surprisingly, it is the wonderfulness of his being and of his acts that stands in the climactic position (cf. "*marvels*" in recent verses, **37:5, 14, 16**). While there are many proper human responses to God's various messages, there is only one appropriate response to his absolute perfection and supremacy: it is **fear**, which is a recognition of the enormous gulf between the human and the divine. This is not only a natural human reaction to the divine; it is also the emotion felt by the "*wise*" or "*everyone thoughtful*" (NJB), those who have busied themselves with learning all that can be known about the ways of God. To accept Elihu's teachings about God does not domesticate God or make his presence more comfortable; God remains fearsome.

Why is Elihu saying all this to Job? He must mean that Job has been too free with God in demanding answers from him, and even more so in charging him with wrong. What we know of God, says Elihu, should lead us to tremble at his majesty, not to conceive of him as a legal opponent or a military enemy, and it would be wisdom for Job to learn that lesson.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is this passage an effective bridge to the final chapters in the book?
- 2) What is Elihu overlooking in the particular circumstances of Job?
- 3) What is your response to contemplating God's great works in the realm of nature?
- 4) How does the contemplation of God's attributes help us to wait upon Him in times of perplexity and silence?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Francis Andersen: This concluding statement contains Elihu's best and most distinctive ideas. Up until now he has been treading on familiar and conventional ground, repeating largely the ideas which Job and his friends have already expressed. The harsh tone that Elihu had adopted in his second and third speeches is here softened. **Job 36:1–21** is a more mature and engaging statement of orthodox theology than anything found elsewhere in the book. Its presence is one of the main reasons why some scholars have found Elihu's contribution so pleasing. While it does repeat some arguments that have already failed to carry the day, they are diffused by a deeper analysis and a more

humane sensitivity that brings them nearer to Job's condition. God's dealings with men are seen not simply in terms of rewards and punishments; they are also remedial, or at least intended to be so, if rightly used. Life teaches through '*discipline*' (the key word of Wisdom teaching, introduced by Eliphaz at the very beginning; cf. **4:3; 5:17**). Every experience, good or bad, brings fresh opportunities to learn more about God. The wise man rides the wave; the fool is drowned by it. Perhaps this is what Elihu was getting at when he said to Job: '*The choice is yours*' (**34:33**). The meaning of suffering depends on the spirit in which it is '*received*' (**2:10**). Since '*discipline*' is imposed on a child by a parent or on a pupil by a teacher, it is intended to be beneficial. The recalcitrant and unteachable, of course, can deprive or even injure themselves by struggling against the yoke; but, correctly worn as an instrument of honourable work, it enables greater achievement and actually lightens the load.

The full answer to Job's suffering cannot therefore be found in questions about justice. Beyond justice there is a benevolence in God that calls men to trust him. More simply stated, the issue is whether a person can continue to believe that **God is really good**. Then he will be able to sing in the dark (**35:10**), no matter what happens. The search for an explanation by tracking Job's sufferings to their **origin** and **cause** has failed. More light will be gained in the search for their **outcome** and **goal**.

David Atkinson: Elihu is thus a **bridge** in the book of Job, stretching from the inadequate theology of a **detached God** – a God of power, might, majesty and dominion but detached from human pain and experience – to the need for **Wisdom**. We are enabled to glimpse the divine Wisdom, the '*wild order of things*', and to receive his gift to enable us to cope. We are brought to the '*fear of the Lord*', the way of living before God in obedience and dependence on grace: that experience of the Lord's active presence which Wisdom implies. . .

Elihu has brought us from theology to wisdom, from argument and despair to **God himself**. So he has brought us in his way to where the Hymn to Wisdom in **Job 28** also brought us. We need to meet the Lord in grace; we need to begin with the fear of the Lord, in communion with him. . .

This idea that wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge, be it technical or theological, but a way of living before God, comes to its sharpest focus in Paul's teaching that Christ is '*the power of God and the wisdom of God*'. Wisdom is Christ in his vulnerability, his self-giving, and his suffering. Wisdom is Christ in his obedience to the Father even to death on the cross.

In Jesus the divine Wisdom is displayed, and by the grace of the Spirit is made available to us. It is the wisdom of the suffering servant of the Lord, by whose sufferings fellowship with the Lord is found.

Tremper Longman: But is it true that "*people get nothing from God*" when they obey and love him? Not according to the book of Job—**they get God**. After all, the book of Job begins with the question "*Does Job fear God for the rewards?*" (**1:9**). Will Job

jettison his relationship with God once it ceases to be of immediate benefit to him? At this point in the book, we have not reached a final conclusion, though the preface remarks how Job has resisted attempts to derail his relationship (2:9–10). Job has even maintained his relationship with God in spite of his friends' arguments and his belief that God is treating him unfairly. At the end of the book, after God has put him in his place, Job continues to maintain his relationship with God and submits to him before there is even the hint of a possibility that the blessings might come back to him.

So people do get something from a relationship with God; they get God, and the thesis of the book is that this is all that is really important. Even so, I believe we are to understand Job's situation during the period between the beginning of his suffering and its end as unusual. Often, but not always and certainly not perfectly, **relationship with God brings joys**. Perhaps one gains a sense of meaning that was absent before. It could be improved relationships with family and friends. It might even be a better standard of living. We are to receive all good things in this life as a gift from God. . .

However, besides teaching that **God does not need humans** or their righteous acts to fill some kind of lack in himself, the Bible also clearly teaches that **God desires to be in relationship with his creation**. An overemphasis on the self-sufficiency of God can also lead to a distortion of our relationship with him. The Bible teaches throughout that God loves his human creatures and desires relationship with them. God rejoices in those who “*fear him*” (Ps. 147:11), in his humble people (Ps. 149:4), in innocent people (Prov. 11:20), in faithful people (Heb. 11:6), and in those who pray (Prov. 15:8). In other words, God is not only **transcendent**; he is also **immanent**, involved with his creation. The story of the Bible is the account of God creating humans to be in relationship with him and with one another. This story is marred by sin and a breaking of relationship. God did not need to preserve humans, but he desired to do so, leading ultimately to the unbelievable sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus Christ.

John Hartley: In his final speech Elihu seeks to persuade Job to focus on God, the Supreme Teacher. The mighty power of God is emphasized in order to make it crystal clear to Job that no human being is ever in a position to dispute with God. Nevertheless, God is compassionate, insistently luring a person from the error of his ways through discipline. Whoever listens to God's instruction will receive blessing.

This time Elihu focuses more on the Teacher than on the Teacher's instructional methods. The incredible wisdom of this Teacher is clearly visible in nature, the particularly marvelous thunderstorm. God's marvelous ways of directing a storm testify to his great wisdom. God masters all forces, and his ways cannot be surpassed. In fact, he uses the weather to affect the course of human and animal activity. In doing this he wishes that all people may know his work. His direction of the clouds and the winds leads people to ponder his perfect knowledge. Such a wise and a good Creator instructs human beings in order that they might revere him.

Elihu's description of a theophany prepares Job to hear Yahweh's words out of the tempest, for in revering God a human being finds true wisdom. In his conclusion Elihu

agrees with the final line of the hymn to wisdom (28:28). His teaching thus prepares Job to abandon his avowal of innocence in an act of full submission to God as his Lord. He enjoins Job to realize that the proper human response to a display of God's splendor is the fear of God (37:21-24). Elihu's exhortation thus foreshadows the response Job will have to Yahweh's theophany (42:1-6).

David Thompson: Every year we hear of storms here and there. Violent showers, flooding, blizzards, tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes and droughts are something that we expect to hear about each year. But one thing we never hear is why there are these kinds of storms. Meteorologists try to make weather pattern observations to determine conditions that may cause the storm. Doppler radar and satellites monitor, record and track storms, but no one can really understand them. I have yet to hear any meteorologist say these storms, no matter what they do, display the power and majesty of God.

Even though we cannot ever determine precisely what God is doing in the storms, we can recognize and acknowledge His sovereign majesty and power. That is exactly the final point Elihu wants to make to Job before God speaks to Job.

GOD IS SOVEREIGNLY AND MAJESTICALLY AT WORK IN STORMS, AND SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHAT GOD IS DOING, THE THING FOR US TO DO IS TO FEAR GOD AND SUBMIT TO GOD, AND TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS SOVEREIGN GREATNESS AND MAJESTY.

Elihu is going to use physical storms to teach a great spiritual lesson. We don't know why God sends a specific storm to a specific area, but we do see His power and majesty and we can trust Him to protect us. God's people do survive storms and they do so in a way that leaves them standing in awe, in a fear and reverence for God. . .

Men need to think about God in the times of storms. **37:14-24**

What men need to do is to develop a reverence for God and turn from their rebellion. There were several things Elihu said that men needed to do. There are six responses they should have:

Response #1 - Men should stand and think about the wonders of God when faced with a storm. **37:14**

Response #2 - Men should realize they do not know many things about God's storms. **37:15-18**

Response #3 - Men should ask God to instruct them what to say in the midst of the storms. **37:19**

Response #4 - Men should be silent before God in the midst of the storms. **37:20**

Response #5 - Men should realize they do not see the bright plan of God. **37:21**

Response #6 - Men should realize that God is an awesome, majestic God. **37:22-23**

Lessons to learn in the storms of our lives:

1. God is trying to get our attention in storms.
2. Storms should cause us to recognize how powerful God is.
3. Storms should cause us to reverence and worship God.
4. Storms should cause us to realize there is much we don't know in the plan of God.
5. Storms should cause us to quiet down and trust God.

TEXT: Job 38:1 – 40:2

TITLE: *INTERROGATION OF JOB REGARDING GOD'S CREATED ORDER*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S AWESOME DESIGN AND PROVIDENTIAL CONTROL OF THE UNIVERSE AND ALL THAT IS IN IT SHOULD CAUSE US TO HUMBLY SUBMIT

INTRODUCTION:

David Atkinson: Chapter 38 tells us that God does answer Job. He does so in this world, in sovereign freedom, and in God's timing. The Elihu speeches, which came after Job's last stand, prevent us from thinking that God is somehow forced into a reply by Job's persistence in his previous speech. Throughout these last few chapters, though, the drums have been rolling, and the climax of the book is now upon us. . .

Job's worst fears were that God had abandoned him. In the silence and the isolation, he had assumed that God had let him down and let him go. Job did not know that God had taken a risk, so to speak, to demonstrate Job's integrity for heavenly purposes of his own. Of course God's withdrawal was all part of the story, for Job's pilgrimage of faith was precisely not a pilgrimage of sight. It is crucial to the story that Job should be in the dark. So he stands as a representative of, and an example for, all those of us who try to keep trusting in the dark. For all those of us whose faith is tested by the darkness and the apparent absence of God, the great reassurance of Job 38 is that **God speaks**. The Lord does come!

Thomas Constable: What God did not say to Job is as surprising as what He did say. He did not mention Job's suffering, He gave no explanation of the problem of evil, He did not defend Himself against Job's charge of injustice, and He made no comment on the retributive principle. God simply revealed Himself to Job and his companions to a greater degree than they had known, and that greater revelation silenced them. He proved Himself to be the truly wise Person.

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

Tremper Longman: In chap. 38 Job finally gets what he desired, an **audience with God**. However, it does not go the way he anticipated. Instead of Job confronting God, God confronts Job (38:1-3). The first divine speech opens with challenging words emanating from a whirlwind. God accuses Job of ignorance and then sets about to prove

it by peppering him with questions. These are rhetorical questions that assume no answer on the correct presumption that Job has none to offer. After all, the questions are completely unfair. No human can expect to know how the creation was put together (38:4–7). No one was there when it happened! Certainly Job does not know how to control the sea (38:8–11) or where its source is located, any more than he knows where the realm of death can be found (38:16–17). Can he command the morning (38:12–15) or control the rain and snow (38:22–30)? Does he know the expanse of the earth (38:18–21) or have knowledge of the heavens (38:31–38)? Of course not. Nor does he know enough about the lion and the raven that he might provide for them (38:39–41). Only God can know and do these things.

Moving into **chap. 39**, God continues the line of the argument against Job initiated in 38:39–41. More animals are listed whose characteristics expose the difference between God and Job. As **Westermann** recognized, the question God asks Job here “sets up an unqualified alternative: **Are you Creator or creature? Are you God or man?** God knows all about how mountain goats and deer reproduce; Job does not (39:1–4). God gives the wild/Arabian onager its freedom; Job does not (39:5–8). God controls the wild ox; Job cannot (39:9–12). God gives the ostrich its speed, while withholding intelligence; Job does not (39:13–18). God gives the warhorse its fearless strength; Job does not (39:19–25). God gives the hawk its ability to soar through the sky; Job does not (39:26–50). With one exception, these are all wild animals with which humans have no real connection. The one exception is the **warhorse**, in whose description it becomes clear that it is only on the edge of domestication, able to be used by humans more for its love of conflict than anything else.

Elmer Smick: The format God has chosen is to ply Job with questions (as a professor would do with a presumptuous student); but strangely he says nothing about Job’s suffering, nor does he address the problem of theodicy. Job does not get the bill of indictment or verdict of innocence he has wanted. But neither is he humiliated with a list of the sins he has committed for which he is being punished. The latter would have been the case if the counselors had been correct. So by implication Job’s innocence is established, and later it is directly affirmed (42:7–8).

John Hartley: After an introduction and opening challenge to Job (38:1–3), Yahweh interrogates Job about the created order (38:4 – 39:30), and concludes by extending an invitation for Job to respond (40:1–2). . . Although there is no mention of mankind in this speech, no doubt intentionally, Job can easily discern Yahweh’s implication that he cares for human beings even more **wisely** and **compassionately** than for the other creatures.

Francis Andersen: To suggest that God’s governance is obscure is to speak in ignorance (38:2). The list is but a sample: the earth (38:4–7), the sea (8–11), morning (12–15), the underworld (16–18), light (19–21), snow (22, 23), storm (24–27), rain (28–30), various constellations (31–33), clouds (34–38), the lion (39, 40), ravens (41), the ibex (39:1–4), the wild ass (5–8), the wild ox (9–12), the ostrich (13–18), the horse (19–25), the hawk (26), the falcon (27–30). The list is assorted, with no strict order. It begins with some

cosmic elements, moves to meteorological phenomena and ends with animals and birds. The horse seems to be the only domesticated animal mentioned, and it is his majesty, not his servility, that is stressed. With this exception, all the creatures mentioned are **beyond the control of men**. Yet all are among God's pets. He cares even for the sparrow. Somehow this discourse arouses in Job a sense of **awe** at the beauty and order of the world. A sense of **mystery** too, for some of these animals seem ugly, repugnant, useless to men. And some of the things mentioned are remote from men, and some are a danger to him.

(38:1) PROLOGUE – THE LORD ANSWERS JOB

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,”

David Atkinson: But now, in **chapter 38** our author wants us to be in no doubt. God is called ‘Yahweh’ once again. Now the gracious Lord of the covenant promise to Abraham is speaking to this man from Uz. Now the God whose name ‘Yahweh’ is associated with his personal presence of care, steadfast love and faithfulness to the people of his covenant, this God speaks to Job.

John Hartley: This panorama of natural phenomena witnesses that Yahweh, the holy God, is actually present. The clouds protect the audience from being consumed by the divine holiness. Those who behold such a display are filled with dread and wonder. The awe strikes the beholder dumb. Each worshiper, drawn out of his self-centered existence as by a powerful magnet, bows reverently before his God.

David Guzik: Repeatedly the whirlwind is associated with the **divine presence**. It speaks to us of the powerful, unmanageable nature of God; that He is like a tornado that cannot be controlled or opposed.

- God brought Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind (**2 Kings 2:1-11**).
- God's presence is in the whirlwind (**Psalms 77:18; Nahum 1:3**).
- God's coming is like a whirlwind (**Isaiah 66:15; Jeremiah 4:13 and 23:19**).
- God appeared to Ezekiel in a whirlwind (**Ezekiel 1:4**).

(38:2-3) OPENING CHALLENGE AND REBUKE – PUTTING JOB IN HIS PLACE

A. (:2) You Have a Limited Perspective

*“Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?”*

John Hartley: Yahweh, the Wise Teacher, takes the offensive and interrogates Job, his complaining servant. Job has pondered his dilemma from many sides, and his questioning has led him to challenge the traditional belief that God governs the world in justice (e.g. **chs. 21 and 24**). Without presenting a self-defense against these accusations, Yahweh opens by putting Job in his place with a question that cast doubt on Job's insight (v. 2). Without discounting Job's moral integrity, Yahweh challenges

Job's perception of his governance of the world. By opening with the words *Who is this?* Yahweh asserts his superiority. Moreover, he shows respect for Job by addressing him as a virile man (*geber*). This choice of words means that neither his affliction nor his inflamed rhetoric has diminished his intrinsic worth as a human being.

Certainly Job lacks insight into the counsel of God, i.e., the wisdom that permeates his creative acts and guides his governance of the universe (cf. **Jer. 32:19**). At times Job approached the truth of his situation with penetrating insight but he fell quickly into despondent outbursts. His anxious fears about his humiliating circumstance have clouded his thinking about Yahweh's purpose. Job has darkened this counsel because **he lacks a broad, comprehensive perspective** of God's ways. His perception has been darkest when he has accused God of acting arbitrarily without regard for justice and when he has assumed that he himself could dispute with God as an equal.

Derek Kidner: What is this chapter all about? God is systematically **reducing Job to size**, deflating all the excess pride inside him by removing from Job's mind every thought that makes God out to be small. It is an outworking of something Elihu has said: "*God comes in awesome majesty*" (**37:22**). Job has been shown a little of that majesty in a tremendous display of God's wisdom and power in nature. Since Job is unable to match it, indeed he is ridiculously puny in comparison, he is not in a position to question what God is doing.

B. (:3) You Should Not Be Trying to Correct God

*"Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!"*

David Atkinson: so here God is inviting Job to consider the beauty and order and wonder of the created world.

I. (38:4-15) INTERROGATION REGARDING CREATION

A. (:4-7) Creation of the Earth

*"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me, if you have understanding,
5 Who set its measurements, since you know?
Or who stretched the line on it?
6 On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone,
7 When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"*

John Hartley: Job is asked to make known his knowledge of the initial stages of the creation of the world as though he were the primordial man who had witnessed the laying of the earth's foundation (cf. **15:7**). From an OT perspective, however, wisdom was God's sole companion present at creation (**ch. 28; Prov. 8:22-31**). Therefore,

since Job lacks this essential knowledge, how could he expect to dispute successfully with God?

Peter Wallace: We have seen throughout the book of Job that **knowledge** and **power** are closely related. If you have knowledge, then you have power. God is saying to Job – you may know correct words – but do you know the things themselves! If you do, then you would have power over them.

Francis Andersen: Knowledge of the **origins of the world** is **inaccessible** to men. Man, the latest arrival on the scene, never observed the beginnings. Creation is a hypothesis, reasonable, but not verifiable. The result is seen, but not the act, nor the Agent. Here then is a vast mystery, and the Bible views it in many different ways. The Old Testament contains at least a dozen creation ‘stories’ which use almost as many different images, casting God in the role of builder, potter, weaver, etc., drawing the illustrations from the crafts of men.

B. (:8-11) Creation of the Sea

*“Or who enclosed the sea with doors,
When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;
9 When I made a cloud its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 And I placed boundaries on it,
And I set a bolt and doors,
11 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther;
And here shall your proud waves stop '?”*

John Hartley: Having brought forth the sea and harnessed it, he commands it and it does his bidding (cf. **Ps. 104:6-9**). This is a way of affirming that there are no belligerent cosmic forces beyond Yahweh’s authority. . .

Since he fully controls or restricts the sea, never can it at will inundate the inhabited land. This wording means that the sea may encroach on the land, but only so far. Its mighty, proud waves break at the seashore, the line drawn by God. Even when the sea is aroused in a violent storm and its waves reach far inland, there is a boundary it may not cross.

C. (:12-15) Creation of Dawn

*“Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
And caused the dawn to know its place;
13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It is changed like clay under the seal;
And they stand forth like a garment.
15 And from the wicked their light is withheld,
And the uplifted arm is broken.”*

Elmer Smick: Verse 14 pictures the long, deep shadows of early morning when the earth reminds us of clay taking the shape of the seal pressed into it or of the folds of a garment. Daylight deprives the wicked of the kind of “light” they need. Here we have a subtle figure (v.15), for “the light” the wicked are denied is certainly “the darkness” that is their element, indeed, “*deep darkness is their morning*” (24:17). The wicked “*put darkness for light and light for darkness*” (Isa 5:20). With the same powerful figure, Jesus warned, “*See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness*” (Lk 11:35).

John Hartley: The rays of dawn overcome the blackness of night and ensure the continuance of life on earth. Every morning, just as a maid vigorously shakes the crumbs from a huge tablecloth, the rays of dawn reach out and grasp the mountains, the corners of the earth’s tablecloth, and shake the wicked off the earth’s surface.

As the morning light etches multiple designs on the horizon in an array of colors, the darkened earth begins to take shape before the human eye. The dawn lights up the hills, valleys, trees, and shrubs. Just as a lump of *clay* is turned into a beautiful design beneath a seal, so too the earth glistens in beauty beneath the sun’s first rays. In another picture the early light of day makes the earth appear as a beautiful *garment*, exquisite in design and glorious in color.

At dawn the wicked, who love darkness, flee into hiding (cf. 24:13-17). The sun eclipses the light of the wicked, i.e., it deprives them of the good fortune and protection night offers them. The sun’s rays prevent them from pursuing their evil designs. Their upraised arm – a sign of their arrogant determination to enforce violently their evil will – is broken. This wording may allude to the fact that during the day the court sits and delivers a stiff sentence of physical impairment against the wicked for their doing evil during the night. Such harsh sentences were designed to break the power of the wicked.

These verses speak directly to Job’s concern that the wicked prosper unchecked (chs. 21, 24). Yahweh counters Job’s complaint with the position that his own command of the light confines the work of the wicked. He has contained the wicked within limits just as he has stayed the encroachment of the sea against the land. Like the sea the wicked may cause terror and turmoil, but the light is the boundary that holds them in. Although God grants a measure of freedom to mankind, the wicked never move outside his control.

II. (38:16-38) INTERROGATION REGARDING CONTROL OVER THE INANIMATE WORLD

John Hartley: Yahweh inquires of Job about his acquaintance with the extremities of the created world. He asks if Job has ever traversed the recesses or the outer limits of the world, whether they be the depths of the sea (vv. 16-18), the distant east (vv. 19-21), or the heights of the heavens (vv. 22-24). The axiom is that whoever knows or controls the extremities of the world has control over the universe. If Job could answer Yahweh’s questions in the affirmative, it would mean that he had comprehensive

knowledge about the universe and understood the way it was governed. But he has never visited these remotest places. The world remains an intriguing enigma to him, as to all human beings.

Warren Wiersbe: The next eleven questions (**Job 38:16-24**) relate to the vast dimensions of creation.

A. (:16-18) Unseen Netherworld (Depths and Expanses) = Gates of Death

*“Have you entered into the springs of the sea?
Or have you walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you?
Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
18 Have you understood the expanse of the earth?
Tell Me, if you know all this.”*

Elmer Smick: Here he turns to mysteries of created things not visible to the human eye. Note the progression: *journeying* (v.16), then *seeing* (v.17), then *understanding* what you see (v.18). Each step in this progression is increasingly **impossible for Job**. Yahweh’s control over this unseen netherworld is just as real as his control over the sea or the land of the living (cf. **26:5–6**). If the names of various deities to whom the myths imputed control of these domains are here as an overtone (cf. **Tsevat**, n. 29), it is to suggest that neither they nor Job but only Yahweh really understands and controls “*all this*” (v.18). What does Job know about those realms where no living human being has ever been?

John Hartley: At the springs of the sea lie the gates to Sheol. These gates are guarded by *deep darkness* (*salmawet*; cf. **Job 3:5**). If Job had walked there he would have seen the gates through which the shades muse pass on their way to Sheol and which prevent their returning to earth. Yahweh asks Job if he has contemplated the *vast expanse* of the underworld. This probing question is especially germane since Job has often expressed his longing for the comforts of death offered by Sheol. At this point Yahweh orders Job to speak, but he remains silent.

B. (:19-21) Mystery of Light and Darkness

*“Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
And darkness, where is its place,
20 That you may take it to its territory,
And that you may discern the paths to its home?
21 You know, for you were born then,
And the number of your days is great!”*

C. (:22-24) Storehouses of Snow and Hail

*“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 Which I have reserved for the time of distress,
For the day of war and battle?”*

*24 Where is the way that the light is divided,
Or the east wind scattered on the earth?"*

D. (:25-27) Storm

*"Who has cleft a channel for the flood,
Or a way for the thunderbolt;
26 To bring rain on a land without people,
On a desert without a man in it,
27 To satisfy the waste and desolate land,
And to make the seeds of grass to sprout?"*

John Hartley: Though no one lives there, the rain God sends nourishes the multitude of desert life. This set of questions implies that human beings, motivated by green and utilitarian attitudes, would never disperse the precious rain to water this desolate land. In their imagined wise (though selfish) planning they would manage the weather for their own profit and pleasure. As a result the balance of nature would be upset and the cultivated land would become a desert. Only God has the wisdom to make it rain in the desert, giving evidence of his wise care for the entire world.

E. (:28-30) Variety of Forms of Moisture

*"Has the rain a father?
Or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb has come the ice?
And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?
30 Water becomes hard like stone,
And the surface of the deep is imprisoned."*

John Hartley: The phenomenon of how water changes into so many different forms bears witness to God's creative genius (cf. **Ps. 147:16-18**).

F. (:31-33) Heavenly Constellations

*"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
Or loose the cords of Orion?
32 Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
And guide the Bear with her satellites?
33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
Or fix their rule over the earth?"*

Elmer Smick: Job has moved with the Lord, in his mind's eye, from the "*recesses of the deep*" and "*gates of death*" (**vv.16–17**) to heavenly constellations. The terminology draws on the interpretation of those fanciful figures the ancients saw in the celestial constellations. Our language in this space age still uses the same terms. The antithesis of binding and loosening the imagined fetters that hold together the cluster of stars called Pleiades or the belt of the hunter Orion rests on poetic license and literary convention. The message is about **God's cosmic dominion** over these stars as they seasonally move across the sky.

G. (:34-38) Meteorological Phenomena

*“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
So that an abundance of water may cover you?
35 Can you send forth lightnings that they may go
And say to you, 'Here we are'?
36 Who has put wisdom in the innermost being,
Or has given understanding to the mind?
37 Who can count the clouds by wisdom,
Or tip the water jars of the heavens,
38 When the dust hardens into a mass,
And the clods stick together?”*

III. (38:39 – 39:30) INTERROGATION REGARDING CONTROL OVER THE ANIMATE WORLD

John Hartley: With these portraits Yahweh asserts his lordship over the entire earth – the cultivated land and the wilderness, the domesticated animals and the wild beasts. No part of the world lies outside his rule. No hostile forces exist beyond his authority. That which seems unruly and demonic to mankind is assuredly subject to God’s rule. This picture of God’s sovereign rule parallels numerous glyphs from the ancient world that depict the might of the monarch’s dominion with the motif that he is Lord of the animals (see also various biblical texts that mention God’s care for animals, e.g., **Ps. 104:14a, 21; 145:15-16; 147:9; Matt. 6:26; 10:29; Luke 12:24**). As Lord of the universe he governs the whole world for the well-being of every creature, including those mankind despises.

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

Roy Zuck: The 12 animals described here – six beasts, five birds, and an insect – all exhibit the **creative genius** and **providential care** of God. Fittingly the list begins with the *lion*, the king of the beasts, and ends with the word for *eagle*, the king of the birds.

A. (38:39-41) Nourishment Provided for Lions and Ravens

*“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
40 When they crouch in their dens,
And lie in wait in their lair?
41 Who prepares for the raven its nourishment,*

*When its young cry to God,
And wander about without food?"*

Elmer Smick: These verses really begin a new aspect of Yahweh's control over nature. From **38:39** to **39:30** the focus is on creatures of the **animal world** that are objects of curiosity and wonder to people. The choice is somewhat random, as though Yahweh is saying, "Here are only a few specimens of all my creatures, great and small, winged and earthbound, wild and tamed—but all are under my care and dominion." It has never crossed Job's mind to hunt prey for lions (**v.39**) or to stuff food into the outstretched gullets of the raven's nestlings (**v.41**). But are not their growls and squawks cries to God, on whom all these creatures ultimately depend?

Francis Andersen: These extraordinary creatures are hard to relate purposefully to men. Although placed in charge of the world, no man would hunt prey for a lioness! Yet God supplies such an animal with food. Explain that!

John Hartley: This short periscope, functioning as an introduction to the long discourse on animals, teaches that Yahweh sustains both the strong and the delicate among the wild animals. He shows his care and protection for all of his creation, and he does so in a way that far surpasses what any human being could or would do.

B. (39:1-4) Gestation and Birthing Practices of Mountain Goats and Deer

*"Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?
Do you observe the calving of the deer?
2 Can you count the months they fulfill,
Or do you know the time they give birth?
3 They kneel down, they bring forth their young,
They get rid of their labor pains.
4 Their offspring become strong,
they grow up in the open field;
They leave and do not return to them."*

Elmer Smick: Throughout the wild kingdom and its rich variety of creatures, God informs Job of his creative and sustaining activity. He provides for each species its own **gestation period** and ability to bear young in the field—without assistance and with a divinely ordered wisdom to provide for themselves and their young. The offspring of an ibex doe, unlike human infants who need years of care, can stand within minutes of birth and soon gambol off to thrive in the wild.

C. (39:5-8) Freedom of the Wild Donkey

*"Who sent out the wild donkey free?
And who loosed the bonds of the swift donkey,
6 To whom I gave the wilderness for a home,
And the salt land for his dwelling place?
7 He scorns the tumult of the city,
The shoutings of the driver he does not hear."*

*8 He explores the mountains for his pasture,
And he searches after every green thing."*

Elmer Smick: One of the most admired animals of the OT world was the **wild donkey** (or *onager*). It was a compliment and a promise of an enviable freedom when the angel declared that Ishmael (**Ge 16:12**) would become "*a wild donkey of a man.*" The creature was admired for both its freedom and its ability to survive under the harshest conditions.

John Hartley: God watches over the wild ass, making sure that it enjoys its freedom amid scarcity.

D. (39:9-12) Strength of the Wild Ox

*"Will the wild ox consent to serve you?
Or will he spend the night at your manger?
10 Can you bind the wild ox in a furrow with ropes?
Or will he harrow the valleys after you?
11 Will you trust him because his strength is great
And leave your labor to him?
12 Will you have faith in him that he will return your grain,
And gather it from your threshing floor?"*

Elmer Smick: In vv.5–8 there was an implied contrast between the wild donkey and the tame donkey. Here there is an explicit contrast between the wild ox and the tame ox. This animal (Heb. *rēm*; "unicorn," KJV; "rhinoceros," Vul.; GK 8028) is believed to be the now-extinct *aurochs* (*Bos primigenius*). Next to the elephant and rhino, it was the largest and most powerful land animal of the biblical world. Most of the nine OT occurrences of the word make reference to it as a symbol of strength (cf. **Nu 23:22; 24:8; Dt 33:17; Ps 29:6**; et al.). It was already rare in Palestine in the time of Moses.

John Hartley: This stalwart animal, which is endowed with more strength than wisdom, is, nevertheless shrewd enough to stay out of bondage. From a human perspective, its strength, being available only for its own needs, goes to waste. God, however, is its master and its sustainer.

E. (39:13-18) Strange and Weird Ostrich

*"The ostriches' wings flap joyously
With the pinion and plumage of love,
14 For she abandons her eggs to the earth,
And warms them in the dust,
15 And she forgets that a foot may crush them,
Or that a wild beast may trample them.
16 She treats her young cruelly, as if they were not hers;
Though her labor be in vain, she is unconcerned; 1
7 Because God has made her forget wisdom,
And has not given her a share of understanding.*

*18 When she lifts herself on high,
She laughs at the horse and his rider.”*

Elmer Smick: The lesson is that God can and does make creatures that appear odd and crazy to us if doing so pleases him. Imagine a bird that can’t fly. Though it has wings, it can run faster than a horse (v.18). Job cannot understand what God is doing in his life, and God is telling him the created world is just as difficult to rationalize.

Francis Andersen: From the sublime to the ridiculous. It is hard to argue that this hilarious sketch of the ostrich serves any solemn didactic purpose. It is what it is, a **silly bird**, because God made it so. Why? This comical account suggests that amid the profusion of creatures some were made to be useful to men, but some are there just for God’s entertainment and ours.

John Hartley: The ostrich is a huge, peculiar-looking bird. Its small head, attached to a large body by a long, skinny neck, makes one chuckle. In addition, although it joyously beats its wings, it fails to fly. . . Even though the ostrich is a bird that cannot fly, astonishingly it can run faster than the stately horse. In a chase this strange creature *laughs at the majestic horse and its rider*. Even though it appears that God has deprived the ostrich of wisdom, in this one aspect he has made it superior, raising it above ridicule to a place of respect. God’s wisdom has marvelously created even the strangest of animals.

F. (39:19-25) The Fearsome Warhorse

*“Do you give the horse his might?
Do you clothe his neck with a mane?
20 Do you make him leap like the locust?
His majestic snorting is terrible.
21 He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength;
He goes out to meet the weapons.
22 He laughs at fear and is not dismayed;
And he does not turn back from the sword.
23 The quiver rattles against him,
The flashing spear and javelin.
24 With shaking and rage he races over the ground;
And he does not stand still at the voice of the trumpet.
25 As often as the trumpet sounds he says, 'Aha!'
And he scents the battle from afar,
And thunder of the captains, and the war cry.”*

Elmer Smick: The horse is the only animal in this poem that is domestic. This unexpected feature still serves the Lord’s purpose, for only one kind of horse is viewed—the charger, the **warhorse**. The creatures of the wild in their proud freedom and curious behavior are obviously beyond Job’s control, but even a creature that man has tamed can display fearsome behavior that excites our imagination. The lines burst

with the literary energy needed to do justice to the performance of this amazing creature during the height of the frenzy of battle.

Francis Andersen: But two questions are applicable to Job.

- Can you make such an animal?
- Can you control him?

Even the well-broken and best-trained mount might break from the restraints of the most skilled rider, so that even the one domesticated animal included in the list is not completely under the control of man. And is man, more free than any beast, to be understood as struggling against the reins of God when stirred up as Job was? If so, we have an allegory.

G. (39:26-30) Flight of the Predator Bird

*“Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars,
Stretching his wings toward the south?
27 Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up,
And makes his nest on high?
28 On the cliff he dwells and lodges,
Upon the rocky crag, an inaccessible place.
29 From there he spies out food;
His eyes see it from afar.
30 His young ones also suck up blood;
And where the slain are, there is he.”*

Francis Andersen: This verse gives a brief glimpse of the hawk, spreading its wings towards the south, probably in his instinctive migration. The question to Job is whether the bird does this by your wisdom (the word is actually ‘*discernment*’, as used in **38:4, 36**). Does God ask if Job endowed the creature with this instinct? But this would mean that Job was the Creator, which is not the issue. Does God ask if the bird’s movements are under Job’s control? The immense difference between a man’s limited mastery of his environment and God’s total sovereignty is certainly one of the themes of these speeches. Or does God ask Job a more intellectual question (suggested by the word ‘understanding’), whether he comprehends how the bird responds to the seasons and flies so gracefully? Perhaps the last two are interwoven in the idea of knowledge which enables a man to control nature.

Elmer Smick: In **v.26** the marvel for Job to contemplate is one we still view with amazement—the **migratory instincts of birds**. Our knowledge that some birds fly thousands of miles each year (cf. the arctic tern, which flies from the Arctic to the Antarctic) serves to validate this particular choice of God’s faunal wonders. The two words used in **vv.26–27** are the Hebrew generic names that include several species. The first (**v.26**) appears to be the *sparrow hawk* (*nēš*; GK 5891), a bird not resident to the Holy Land but known because it stops off there each year in its migration (**Kline**, 486). In **v.27** the *griffon vulture* (*nešer*; GK 5979) is the largest bird of the area. The same word is used for the true “*eagle*” (NIV), but here a carrion eater is in mind. Several

interesting characteristics of this bird are mentioned: its soaring ability, its aerie (nest) high on the crags, and its phenomenal eyesight.

(40:1-2) CLOSING CHALLENGE AND REBUKE – WILL YOU NOW SUBMIT?

*“Then the LORD said to Job,
2 ‘Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who reproves God answer it.’”*

Derek Kidner: Continuing the imagery which we have already noticed, of a challenge to engage in a wrestling match, this section concludes with a request that Job **yield** to the Lord’s greater strength and wisdom. It is, basically, an appeal for Job’s **submission**. [It is possible to translate: “*Will the contender with the Almighty yield?*”]

Francis Andersen: If Job understands any of these matters better than God, God is willing to learn from him. The question is ironical, of course; but in view of the friendly tone of the speeches, it is not at all snide.

Delitzsch: The question means, will Job persist in this contending with God? He who sets God right, as though he knew everything better than He, shall answer the questions put before him.

Elmer Smick: Here, then, in **40:2** the Lord gets to the point. Job has set himself up arbitrarily as God’s accuser. How can Job assume such a lofty position in the light of who God is? After this front-row seat surveying the marvels and mysteries of God’s created universe, is Job still ready to make his proud insinuations and accusations about the nature of God’s lordship over all things? It is Job’s turn to speak again. But there will be no long speeches, no more rage, no more challenging his Creator.

John Hartley: **The tables have been turned.** Job, the questioner, is being questioned. Building on the evidence just given, Yahweh asks Job a penetrating question that pinpoints the implication of his complaint. That is, in advocating the rightness of his own position so tenaciously, Job has implied that God needs to be corrected. Having presented his position, Yahweh now offers Job the opportunity to articulate such a correction. Moreover, since Yahweh has spoken in response to Job’s challenge, Job may not remain silent without voiding his oath of innocence. His silence would imply his concession. But if he continues to argue, he will leave himself open to divine rebuke.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When has God had to shrink you down to size and magnify His person?

- 2) What lessons do you learn as you observe God's Creation and Control of the Universe?
- 3) Why didn't God address the specific questions and challenges that Job had raised?
- 4) How should Job have responded to this interrogation by God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Francis Andersen: But Job's faith is not exercised blindly, in a vacuum. He still finds **God in the world**. This is very important, indeed it is vital for understanding the Lord's speeches. These charming poems about goats and ostriches are not at a tangent to the rest of the book. It is as a man in the world, as one among all these creatures, that Job stands before God. He is not called to a flight of pure thought into the transcendent Beyond. He is not called to plunge into the depths of his own being to find the Ground of all. It is by looking at the **common things** with God that Job is able to exclaim in the end: *'Now I'm satisfied; I've seen You with my own eyes'* (42:5). This is more than enough to answer his questions, or rather it liberates him to live with joy even when the questions are not answered.

John Hartley: Yahweh seeks to convince Job that he created the world in wisdom and that he governs it wisely, in justice and with compassion. He laid the world's foundation precisely according to the blueprints. Then he brought forth the sea and established its limits. Afterward he called forth the sun to enlighten the earth and to send the wicked into hiding. All of this is proof that he has placed justice at the center of the world's structure. In the periscope about the sun Yahweh says that although he does not always punish the wicked immediately for their wicked deeds, these evildoers are subject to his authority. As with the sea, he restricts their activity. . .

If Job had repented of some contrived sin to find relief, he would have compromised his own integrity and violated the purity of his faith in God by seeking to use God for personal gain. Now the issue Yahweh puts before him is whether he will continue to place his trust in Yahweh as a good and faithful God or reject God, thinking him to be a capricious, hostile force. According to Yahweh's argument, it is improper for Job to judge his governance of the world based on the appearance of matters on earth. Since Job is not knowledgeable enough to discover why things take place on earth as they do, he is left with a decision – either to trust Yahweh, believing that he wisely rules his created world, or to pursue his complaint that exalt himself above Yahweh. Yahweh leaves the initiative with Job either to believe him or to continue to accuse him.

David Thompson: God does not answer one question Job asked, nor does He solve or refute the logic and arguments of Job's friends, which are all wrong. What God does do is to impress upon Job the greatness of His sovereignty and it is this high, heavenly and

holy portrait that brings Job to the point where he learns the lesson he needed to learn; namely keep your mouth shut and trust God (40:3-5; 42:1-6).

WHEN WE ARE EXPERIENCING TERRIBLE TROUBLES AND TRIALS AS BELIEVERS, WE DO NOT NEED TO KNOW ALL THE REASONS WHY WE ARE EXPERIENCING THE TROUBLE, BUT WE DO NEED TO DEVELOP A QUIET, DEEP TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGN GREATNESS.

God esteemed Job as the best man on earth (1:8; 2:3). But God did not tell Job the why of everything. Job knew nothing about Satan appearing before God's throne. Job knew nothing of the challenge that Satan made against Job. Job knew nothing of the angelic world that was watching Job. All Job knew was that he was hit with terrible things. The lesson God wanted Job to learn through all of this was not a lesson of the doctrine of Satan or angels, it was the lesson of trusting God's sovereignty. God was in sovereign control of this whole scene and Job needed to learn to trust in God's majestic sovereignty.

Warren Wiersbe: (chs. 38-42) God's address can be summarized in three questions:

1. "Can you **explain** My creation?" (38:1-38)
2. "Can you **oversee** My creation?" (38:39 – 39:30)
Job's first response (40:1-5)
3. "Can you **subdue** My creation?" (40:6 – 41:34)
Job's second response (42:1-6)

The first question dealt with God's power and wisdom in bringing the universe into being. The second dealt with the providential care of His creatures, and the third centered on two creature (probably the hippopotamus and the crocodile) that defy man's ability to subdue them. When Job repented of his self-righteousness, God restored him (vv. 7-17).

God is now called "*the Lord*," that is, Jehovah God, a name that (except for 12:9) has not been used in the book of Job since the first two chapters. In their speeches, the men have called Him "*God*" and "*the Almighty*" but not "*Jehovah*." This is the name that God revealed to Israel centuries later (Ex. 3:13ff), the name that speaks of His self-existence ("*I AM THAT I AM*") and His personal covenant relationship to His people.

TEXT: Job 40:3-5

TITLE: JOB'S FIRST REPLY – JOB HUMBLLED AND SILENCED

BIG IDEA:

CONFRONTED WITH HIS RELATIVE SMALLNESS, JOB IS HUMBLLED AND SILENCED

INTRODUCTION:

Elmer Smick: Job, the challenger, in a hand-over-mouth posture that signifies his intention to **remain silent (v.4)**, realizes how complex and mysterious God's ways are. In other words, the view of the things from God's perspective has chastened Job. His reply is based not so much on his unworthiness (NIV) as on his **insignificance**. God has not crushed Job. God has not done what the counselors wanted when they reduced Job to zero, but he has **cured Job's presumption**. The Hebrew verb translated "*unworthy*" means "*to be light*" or "*lightly esteemed*" (GK 7837) and in that sense "*contemptible*." Job sees how contemptible it must have appeared to God when he said "*like a prince I would approach him*" (31:37).

David Clines: Job's first response seems at first timid and insipid, as well as surprisingly brief; it is a far cry from the passion and the scope of his previous speech in **chaps. 29—31**. Yet the position he adopts is quite subtle, and not at all without bravery. He admits to feeling humiliated by Yahweh, and yet he **does not concede that he is in the wrong**. If anything, he wants what he has said, over and over again (which is what '*once ... twice*' [v 5] means), to stand on the record. He is adding nothing to what he has said, but he is withdrawing nothing.

Tremper Longman: Challenged by God (see v. 2), Job responds, but not with a defense. Though Job on occasion thought he would put God in his place (31:35–37), God has just **set Job in his place**. Job knows this and so responds appropriately, acknowledging that he is "*small*" compared to God. Thus he will not offer a defense. He places his hand over his mouth. While some modern interpreters offer the absurd and unsupported interpretation that this is a gesture indicating contemptuous revulsion, the context clarifies the significance of the action: **Job has decided to stop speaking**. Job had spoken in earlier chapters but now has come to regret his statements. He will not make the same mistake twice.

David Atkinson: In this context, Job realizes for the first time that he has in fact overstepped the mark in his protest. He should not have found fault with the Almighty. He should not have insisted on his own understanding. He should not have accused God of injustice. So he replies: "*I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? . . . I will say no more*" (40:4). For once he is **practically silenced**. God has spoken to Job, and Job has very little left to say.

Thomas Constable: Earlier in the book Job had hesitated to confront God (9:14). Gradually he became more confident and demanded an audience with God (13:22a). Still later, he spoke almost as God's equal, boasting that he would approach God as a prince (31:37). Now, having discovered his own insignificance (40:4), he had nothing more to say to God (40:5). **God had humbled him.** Job felt no need to speak more, since he had repeated himself earlier (cf. 33:14). However, Job did not confess any sin. Therefore, God proceeded to speak again.

Roy Zuck: Seeing that man is not the world's master, and that God controls and cares for his creation, Job acknowledged

- (a) **his insignificance** (*unworthy* comes from the verb *qalal*, "to be silent, trifling, small, insignificant") and
- (b) **his inability to defend himself further.** His former self-confidence . . . now was changed to humble submission.

Warren Wiersbe: Until we are **silenced** before God, He can't do for us what needs to be done. As long as we defend ourselves and argue with God, He can't work for us and in us to accomplish His plan through us.

But Job was not quite broken and at the place of sincere repentance. **He was silent but not yet submissive;** so, God continued His address.

(:3) PROLOGUE: JOB'S FIRST REPLY

"Then Job answered the LORD and said,"

I. (:4) JOB IS SILENCED IN LIGHT OF HIS RELATIVE SMALLNESS

*"Behold, I am insignificant;
what can I reply to Thee?
I lay my hand on my mouth."*

G. Campbell Morgan: Quite literally it means, *of no weight*. Job did not here in the presence of the majesty of God confess moral perversity, but **comparative insignificance**.

Spurgeon: We must all be caused to see our "*lightness*" next to God. Surely, if any man had a right to say I am not vile, it was Job; for, according to the testimony of God himself, he was '*a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil.*' Yet we find even this eminent saint when by his nearness to God he had received light enough to discover his own condition, exclaiming, '*Behold I am vile.*'

David Guzik: All of the arguing of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu could not bring Job to this place. Only the revelation of God could so humble Job and set him in his right place before the LORD. Job made his strong and sometimes outrageous statements when he felt, to the core of his soul, that the LORD had forsaken him. Now with his

sense of the presence of the LORD restored, Job could better see his **proper place** before God.

It is important to remember that God never did forsake Job; that while He withdrew the sense of His presence (and this was the cause of profound misery to Job), God was present with Job all along, strengthening Him with His unseen hand. Job could have never survived this ordeal without that unseen, unsensed hand of God supporting him.

Mason: Perhaps one of the most worshipful gestures of all is the uncommon one that Job here performs: **covering the mouth with the hand**. The act is a demonstration of **total submission**. One can fall on one's face and yet continue to blubber and babble. But to yield the tongue is to yield everything.

George Barton: To come face to face with the Creator and Sustainer of the mysteries of life had made Job feel his own **insignificance**. This was the first step necessary to a healthy frame of mind. His sufferings, as is shown by his earlier speeches, had made him extremely egotistical; the universe seemed to **centre in him**. He now realizes what an atom he is.

F. B. Meyer: What a different tone is here! This is he who so vehemently protested his innocence, and defended himself against the attacks of his accusers. The Master is come, and the servant who had contended with his fellows takes a lowly place of humility and silence.

The first step in the noblest life, possible to any of us, is to learn and say that we are of small account. We may learn it by successive and perpetual failures which abash and confound us. It is better to learn it by seeing the light of God rise in majesty above the loftiest of earth's mountains. "When I was young," said Gounod to a friend, "I used to talk of 'I and Mozart.' Later I said, 'Mozart and I.' But now I only say Mozart." Substitute God, and you have the true story of many a soul.

II. (:5) JOB OFFERS NO MORE CHALLENGES TO GOD'S JUSTICE

*"Once I have spoken, and I will not answer;
Even twice, and I will add no more."*

Joseph Benson: Vain, therefore, are the excuses which some interpreters make for Job, as if he were **faultless** in his foregoing speeches, when both God charges him with blame therein, and Job himself confesses that he was blameable.

Adam Clarke: I shall attempt **to justify myself** no longer I have spoken repeatedly; and am confounded at my want of respect for my Maker, and at the high thoughts which I have entertained of my own righteousness. All is impurity in the presence of thy Majesty.

Ron Daniel: When confronted with the true and living God, Job realizes his inability to say anything. Who is he to reprove God? Who is he to question His ways? Who is he

compared to the Lord?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we guard against thinking too highly of ourselves and too lowly of our God?
- 2) How patient was the Lord with Job's challenges and disputings?
- 3) When is it appropriate to be quiet and submissive in the divine presence rather than communicative and assertive?
- 4) When do we step over the line and complain too much to the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: As usual, a heading introduces a new speech. Amazingly, the loquacious Job has been reduced to a few words. The brevity of his reply indicates that he has nothing to add to his avowal of innocence, not even in the light of what Yahweh has said. Overwhelmed by Yahweh's majesty, he is aware of his own insignificance. He confesses, *I am small (qalloti)*. This word for "being small or light" is the opposite of "honor" (kabod, lit. "heavy"). Although Job has been vexed that his misfortune has discredited his prestige (cf. **19:9; 29:20**), he defers his personal honor to Yahweh's greater honor. He concedes that he is in no position to answer Yahweh. It has happened just as he feared. In his second speech of the dialogue (**ch. 9**) he stated his apprehension that if granted a meeting with God he would not be able to find words to dispute with him (**9:14**). The reasons for his silence, however, are different from those he had imagined. Whereas he thought that God would beat him down with his power, it is the power of Yahweh's rhetoric that causes him to put his hand over his mouth in dumbfounded astonishment (cf. **21:5; 29:9; Fohrer**).

By this gesture he also restrains himself from speaking. While he does not wish to take up a new line of argument or to introduce other matters, he does not yet renounce the position he has taken once, yea even twice (cf. **33:14**). He is saying that he continues to stand behind his avowal of innocence. However, the fact that he does not want to add to his case shows that he feels the impact of Yahweh's speech. His confidence of winning a debate with Yahweh has greatly diminished before the power of God's presence. But given this response from Job it will be necessary for Yahweh to continue his discourse to persuade Job to submit completely to his lordship.

Francis Andersen: Job's response is **subdued, humble**. He rates himself as '*light*', but hardly '*contemptible*'. But is it correct to say, as **Rowley** does (p. 326), that Job

‘confessed and submitted’? Job has nothing to say. But does declining the invitation admit ‘defeat’? Misunderstanding at this point has made it difficult for some commentators to see why a second speech from God should be needed. . . we suggest that Job’s reply is somewhat evasive, and not at all a satisfactory end to the matter. The gesture of placing the hand over the mouth could be a mark of respect (cf. **21:5; 29:9**) or a sign of silence. Job admits that he cannot answer, but he still does not admit to any sin, so there is no ‘confession’. Nor does he retract any of his former statements, so there is no ‘submission’. On the contrary, he seems to be sticking to his guns. He has already spoken once, and need say no more. Indeed he has already repeated himself (twice) and will not ‘*add*’ anything. This suggests that Job has nothing to say that he has not already said. But it would be going too far in the other direction to find defiance here, or even a complaint that God has still not answered his questions. But even if that were so, the words of God which immediately follow supply this lack.

Elmer Smick: Job has been so moved by this experience, so taken out of himself by his vision of God, that he is released from his problem—his concern to be vindicated. And yet God has given him no explanation of his sufferings. Job will no longer alternate outbursts of rage and self-pity. But he is still on the rack; his suffering has not abated. Job has gone beyond it to see and trust God as his friend. As a friend God has brought Job out of his bitterness to a full realization that he must reckon with God as God. And yet Job still does not know how God put himself on trial when he allowed Job to be afflicted under Satan’s instigation. So **Job is humbled** and thereby prepared for the Lord’s second speech, which will pull together some important threads and bring the drama to a climax.

David Thompson: The lesson Job needed to learn was one of quietly trusting God’s sovereignty even when you can’t figure out what is happening in your world. That is the same lesson we need to learn.

It doesn’t matter how spiritual or big we think we are, when compared to God we are insignificant. **J. Vernon McGee** used to say if we could see ourselves as God does, we couldn’t stand ourselves.

God is governing the entire universe and we are but a speck of dust. We are in no position to question, criticize or challenge God. We need to keep our mouth shut and stop talking in a foolish way. Here is a critical point to learn; the only way some people will shut their mouths is by showing them the vast disparity between the infinite, holy God and sinful, finite man.

Edward Gibson: But the panorama of creation, and the pointed question addressed to him have done their work. Job acknowledges his *littleness*, and confesses his inability to answer.

“The God who sets bounds to the sea, who refreshes the desert, who feeds the ravens, who cares for the gazelle in the wilderness and the eagle in its eyrie, is the same God Who now causes him seemingly thus unjustly to suffer. But if the former is worthy of adoration, the latter will also be so. Therefore Job confesses

that he will henceforth keep silence, and solemnly promises that he will now no longer contend with Him.” (Delitzsch)

Theodore Epp: Job had contended with God. He had argued against God's dealing with him, which was the root of his problem. He, the creature, had sat in judgment against God, the Creator. He had even accused God of doing the wrong thing.

Now God had spoken to Job and made His presence known. From nature He had emphasized very obvious lessons so that Job could not fail to catch the moral principles involved. No wonder Job replied that he was vile.

How could Job really answer God after this revelation of God's care for His creatures? Job realized how contemptible he had been in speaking as he did of the Lord.

He had thought the Lord cruel and unjust; in reality God had shown His love to Job. Job decided all he could do was put his hand on his mouth, say nothing more and just listen to God.

How do we face times of suffering? Do we wonder after a long period of testing if God really cares?

We seek for love and care, and God in His grace is ready and willing to love us and care for us; but above all we must remember that God has permitted this testing and has a purpose in it. God is both sovereign and righteous; therefore, He always does what is right.

<http://www.backtothebible.org/devotions/nothing-more-to-say>

TEXT: Job 40:6 – 41:34

TITLE: WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS IN GOD'S MORAL UNIVERSE?

BIG IDEA:

ONLY THE CREATOR AND CONTROLLER OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND IMPRESSIVE CREATURES CAN DETERMINE WHAT IS JUST IN OVERALL WORLD GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION:

David Atkinson: The common factor in all the animals we have met earlier in **chapters 38 and 39** is that they are not under human control. God's questioning of Job has shown how much of creation is God's secret, and not open to human power and human competence. We have been given a vision of God's **wisdom**. Now, Behemoth, the hippo (**40:15**) and Leviathan, the crocodile (**41:1**), raise the question of God's **power**. God selects two of the creatures which are most feared.

[Note: Or these could be some type of land and sea ancient dinosaurs or could be representative mythological creatures.]

Tremper Longman: Job's initial response was not sufficient to bring a stop to God's torrent of challenging questions whose purpose is to show Job **his proper place in the cosmos**. Job's complaints have been silenced, but he has not yet shown **regret**. God remains upset, as indicated by his continuing to speak out of the whirlwind (see **38:1**). Since Job has chosen silence, God does not ask the initial question of the first speech ("*Who is this who darkens advice with ignorant words?*" **38:2**) but warns Job to **prepare for a second set of questions** with a repeat of **38:3**, "*Brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you must answer me.*" As we will see, the questions continue to come fast and furious, but there will be no answers from Job.

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

John Hartley: Yahweh continues to challenge Job about his intention of disputing his case before the heavenly court. If Job is correct in supposing that God has acted unjustly in his regard, he should be able to adorn himself in regal apparel and humble all the proud. So Yahweh challenges Job to demonstrate his prowess by defeating in mortal combat the ominous creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. If he cannot master these symbols of cosmic powers, he will have to abandon his complaint. Furthermore, Yahweh is arguing that he masters every force in the world.

By continuing to question Job Yahweh is expressing his care for his servant. He is seeking to overcome Job's resistance by gently and persuasively leading him to submission. . .

Yahweh confronts Job with the major flaw in his accusations. In defending his own innocence so emphatically and lashing out so vehemently at God because of his suffering, Job has essentially charged God with acting unjustly. For a mortal to presume himself guiltless and to impugn God's just governance of the world approaches the sin of presumptuous pride.

It is important to observe that Yahweh does not accuse Job of any specific sin, thereby agreeing that Job has lived a righteous life. Nevertheless, if the relationship between himself and his servant is to be restored, Job's self-righteous attitude must be altered and his complaint against God's just governance of the world must be corrected.

Delitzsch: This second time also Jehovah speaks to Job out of the storm; not, however, in wrath, but in the profound condescension of His majesty, in order to deliver His servant from dark imaginings, and to bring him to free and joyous knowledge. He does not demand blind subjection, but free submission; He does not extort an acknowledgment of His greatness, but it is effected by persuasion. It becomes manifest that God is much more forbearing and compassionate than men. ... He does not cast Job to the ground by His authoritative utterances, but deals with him as a child; He examines him from the catechism of nature, and allows him to say for himself that he fails in this examination.

Elmer Smick: This time God will accomplish more than he had in the first speech, where he humbled Job by showing him how he is Creator and Sustainer of the natural world. Here God will convince Job that he is also **Lord of the moral order**—one whose justice Job cannot discredit. And appropriately Job's response this time is repentance (**42:1–6**).

(40:6) PROLOGUE: SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS ISSUED BY THE LORD

"Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm, and said,"

I. (40:7-14) CHALLENGING QUESTIONS TO PUT JOB IN HIS PLACE

A. (:7-9) Can You Really Step Up to the Plate?

1. (:7) Next Round of Interrogation

*"Now gird up your loins like a man;
I will ask you, and you instruct Me."*

David Thompson: Again, we see the critical point directly from God—when we come to the place where we completely trust God's sovereign greatness, no matter what is happening, we are manly in our spirituality. People who are manly are not whiners or complainers. They do not murmur about God, they trust God. They totally and completely trust God's sovereignty.

Albert Barnes: An expression taken from the ancient mode of dress. That was a loose, flowing robe, which was secured by a girdle when traveling, or when one entered upon

anything requiring energy. The meaning here is, “Prepare thyself for the highest effort that can be made. Put forth all your strength, and explain to me what will now be said.”

2. (:8) Who Sets the Standard for Justice?

“Will you really annul My judgment?

Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?”

Tremper Longman: God begins with a question that contains a telling, implicit accusation that helps us understand how we should interpret Job’s speeches in the dialogue and his monologue. “*Would you invalidate my justice?*” (v. 8a). The question charges Job with **illegitimately undermining God’s justice**. As I have argued, Job agreed with the three friends that only sinners should suffer, but he differed from them in that he did not believe he was a sinner. His conclusion was that God had unjustly made him suffer like a sinner. He was more concerned with his own reputation for righteousness than he was with God’s reputation for justice (v. 8b).

David Guzik: We might say that Job fell into the trap of thinking that because he couldn’t figure God out, that perhaps God wasn’t fair. Yet in this larger section of God’s revelation of Himself to Job, God has demonstrated that there are many things that Job doesn’t know, and therefore was not a fit judge of God’s ways.

David Clines: In v 8, Yahweh’s question “*Will you annul my cause?*” means that he has correctly heard Job’s speeches as not merely a demand for personal vindication but, more far-reachingly, a **critique of God’s government of the world** and as demanding an alternative world-order. Now Job has had two separate criticisms to make of the world-order he experiences: the one is that a righteous man like himself may suffer unjustly; the other is that the wicked, who ought to be punished, often prosper. Yahweh takes up only the latter point here, but no doubt it stands also for the former. In Job’s theology there is no room for the prosperity of the wicked, though there is in Yahweh’s world. Since Yahweh is not going to change his world order, let Job re-order the world to his own taste by crushing the wicked (vv 11–13); then he will have “*delivered*” himself from the risky role he has adopted as God’s opponent (v 14).

Albert Barnes: Wilt thou “reverse” the judgment which I have formed, and show that it should have been different from what it is? This was implied in what Job had undertaken. He had complained of the dealings of God, and this was the same as saying that he could show that those dealings should have been different from what they were. When a man complains against God, it is always implied that he supposes he could show why his dealings should be different from what they are, and that they should be reversed. . .

“*Wilt thou show that I am wrong because thou art superior in justice?*” Job had allowed himself to use language which strongly implied that God was improperly severe. He had regarded himself as punished far beyond what he deserved, and as suffering in a manner which justice did not demand. All this implied that “he” was more righteous in the case than God, for when a man allows himself to vent such complaints, it indicates

that he esteems himself to be more just than his Maker. God now calls upon Job to maintain this proposition, since he had advanced it, and to urge the arguments which would prove that “he” was more righteous in the case than God. It was proper to demand this. It was a charge of such a nature that it could not be passed over in silence, and God asks, therefore, with emphasis, whether Job now supposed that he could institute such an argument as to show that he was right and his Maker wrong.

3. (:9) Who Demonstrates Ultimate Power and Authority?

a. Power Demonstrated in Action

“Or do you have an arm like God,”

Tremper Longman: God’s “*arm*” is a metaphor for his **power to act decisively in history (Exod. 6:6; 15:6)**. It is not only God’s actions but also his “*voice*” that resonates with power (v. 9b).

John Hartley: Yahweh specifically challenges Job to exercise authority over the mighty and the proud among men by punishing those who violate justice. When God appears, he displays his power and authority, represented here by the symbols *arm* and *voice*. In the OT “*God’s outstretched arm*” means that God intervenes mightily in earthly affairs to accomplish his purpose. And when he speaks, his voice thunders forth, inspiring fear in his subjects. Can Job prove his demands by manifesting such authority?

b. Power Demonstrated in Authority Commanded Audibly

“And can you thunder with a voice like His?”

Elmer Smick: Could Job by his power and glory create and sustain all that? Obviously not! So Job needs also to leave to his Creator **supremacy in the moral realm**. Job has no power to crush wickedness finally; so obviously he needs to leave that ultimate exercise of justice to God. He needs to **let God be God**. He needs to cease his agitation over what God is doing and trust him to do right.

B. (:10-14) Take Your Best Shot

David Clines: the series of **seven imperatives** in vv 10–14 compels us to keep those lines together) . . . With a series of seven imperatives (which are not to be understood as commands), Yahweh ironically invites Job to take over the governing of the world, and especially to rid it of all its wicked inhabitants. It is not that Yahweh thinks it would be a good idea, for it lies outside the divine plan for the cosmos; but since it seems so important to Job, let him try!

1. (:10) Look the Part of the Master of the Universe

*“Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity;
And clothe yourself with honor and majesty.”*

John Hartley: To demonstrate his rulership, Job must *adorn himself with majesty and grandeur* and *robe himself in glory and splendor*. The heaping up of words for

incomparable majesty captures the grandeur that attends God's manifestation of his kingship (cf. **Ps. 93:1; 96:6**). Even an earthly king displays his authority in regal dress and in the terribleness of his bearing (cf. **Ps. 21:6 [Eng. 5]; 45:4 [Eng. 3]**).

2. (:11-13) Act the Part

*"Pour out the overflowings of your anger;
And look on everyone who is proud, and make him low.
12 Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him;
And tread down the wicked where they stand.
13 Hide them in the dust together;
Bind them in the hidden place."*

Tremper Longman: In vv. 11–13 God sarcastically challenges Job to bring judgment on the arrogant wicked. Job has questioned God's justice in giving the wicked their proper due. He thus tells Job to bring his anger to bear on them so they submit and are crushed before him. **Verse 13** is rather obscure when God tells Job to "*hide them in the dust*," but this phrase is perhaps best understood as an **allusion to burial**. Can Job get rid of the wicked by killing them in his righteous anger and then burying them? Of course not. He cannot make their presence ("*faces*," v. 13b) go away into "*the hidden world*," probably an allusion to the underworld.

Albert Barnes: vs. 13 -- The phrase "to bind them," is expressive of having them under control or subjection; and the phrase "*in secret*" may refer to some secret or safe place - as a dungeon or prison. The meaning of the whole is, that God had power to restrain and control the haughty and the wicked, and he appeals to Job to do the same.

3. (:14) Earn Your Respect by Proving Your Sovereignty

*"Then I will also confess to you,
That your own right hand can save you."*

John Hartley: Should Job clothe himself in kingly majesty and defeat the proud, God would *laud* him as the victor in the present contest. He would have proved his complaint that God rules without regard for justice. There is a strongly ironic tone in Yahweh's argument: if Job could do all of this, he would not need God. Job would have no need to pleading for a vindicator, for his *own right hand* could *deliver* him.

Albert Barnes: If you can do all this, it will be full proof that you can save yourself, and that you do not need the divine interposition. If he could do all this, then it might be admitted that he was qualified to pronounce a judgment on the divine counsels and dealings. He would then show that he had qualifications for conducting the affairs of the universe.

II. (40:15 – 41:34) REFLECTING ON GOD'S CREATION AND CONTROL OF THE ULTIMATE LAND AND SEA CREATURES – BEHEMOTH AND LEVIATHAN

John Hartley: Yahweh is laying bare the pride that underlies Job's defense of his innocence. If Job realizes his own creatureliness, he may humble himself and admit anew God's authenticating presence into his life.

The identification of the Behemoth and Leviathan is disputed, ranging from earthly creatures to mythical monsters. As earthly beasts they are identified as the hippopotamus and the crocodile respectively. Realistic, detailed descriptions keep the portrait from becoming purely mythical. Nevertheless, into the factual description the author skillfully blends fanciful metaphors drawn from mythic accounts of monsters in order that these beasts may represent both mighty terrestrial creatures and cosmic forces. In this way Yahweh addresses the cosmic dimensions of Job's affliction.

David Clines: By the standards of the animal kingdom, the hippopotamus would seem rather to be a **beast without qualities**. It has no practical use for humans, but neither does it have the admirable spirit of freedom of the wild ass (39:5–8), or the brave spirit of the war horse (39:19–25), the hunting skills of the lion and the raven (38:39–41), the farsightedness of the eagle (39:27–30), the fecundity of the mountain goats (39:1–4), or even the strange paradoxical nature of the ostrich (39:13–18). The wonder is that God has taken the trouble to create such a **useless creature**. Yet he has, and Behemoth is as much a creation of his as is humanity (v 15a). Can it be that it is Behemoth, rather than humanity, that is his masterpiece because Behemoth so well represents God's freedom—his freedom to refuse rules and rationality and principles of utility, even aesthetics?

A. (40:15-24) Impressive Behemoth - The Ultimate Land Creature

1. (:15) Impressive Creature Overall

a. Commonality of Creation with Mankind

“Behold now, Behemoth, which I made as well as you;”

David Clines: The **nodal verse** is plainly 40:15 *“Consider now Behemoth, which I made as I made you.”* The principal purpose of the speech is to invite Job to reflect on the **significance of the animal creation**, and this headline sentence nicely encapsulates that purpose.

b. Distinctiveness of His Eating Habits

“He eats grass like an ox.”

Tremper Longman: The best understanding is that Behemoth and Leviathan are not real creatures, but rather **represent the ultimate in land animals and sea creatures, respectively**. I will explain the background of Leviathan in the next section. *“Behemoth”* in Hebrew is the plural of the common word for *“animal”* (and used that way in Joel 1:20). The plural here in Job is one of **majesty** and indicates the **ultimate land creature**.

David Clines: The size and strength of the hippopotamus might well suggest that it is a fearsome carnivorous animal, but in fact this huge monster eats only grass and aquatic plants. In a single night's grazing, however, a hippopotamus may consume over 100 pounds of grass.

2. (:16-18) Impressive Physical Strength

David Guzik: God seems to rejoice in His own creation as He describes the wonder of this remarkable animal noting its strength, size, appetite, and habits.

- a. (:16) Strength in His Loins and Belly
*“Behold now, his strength in his loins,
And his power in the muscles of his belly.”*
- b. (:17) Strength in His Tail and Thighs
*“He bends his tail like a cedar;
The sinews of his thighs are knit together.”*

Tremper Longman: Some commentators, though, believe that “*tail*” here is a euphemism for the penis and that its hardening is a way of indicating its virility. If so, then the “*thighs*” of the next colon may be a reference to the testicles.

George Barton: “*His tail like a cedar*” -- Commentators have found in this a gross exaggeration. The tail of the hippopotamus is short and stumpy, and they have understood cedar as though it were a cedar tree. It can as well be a **cedar log**, however, and the poet is saying that the tail of the hippopotamus is like a cedar log, **straight** and **strong**.

- c. (:18) Strength in His Bones and Limbs
*“His bones are tubes of bronze;
His limbs are like bars of iron.”*

3. (:19-22) Impressive Preeminence

- a. (:19) Preeminent as the Crown of God's Creation
*“He is the first of the ways of God;
Let his maker bring near his sword.”*
- b. (:20) Preeminent Provision and Protection
*Surely the mountains bring him food,
And all the beasts of the field play there.”*

Albert Barnes: That is, though he lies commonly among the reeds and fens, and is in the water a considerable portion of his time, yet he also wanders to the mountains, and finds his food there. But the point of the remark here does not seem to be, that the mountains brought forth food for him, but that he gathered it “*while all the wild beasts played around him, or sported in his very presence.*” It was remarkable that an animal

so large and mighty, and armed with such a set of teeth, should not be carnivorous, and that the wild beasts on the mountains should continue their sports without danger or alarm in his very presence. This fact could be accounted for partly because the “motions” of the hippopotamus were so very slow and clumsy that the wild beasts had nothing to fear from him, and could easily escape from him if he were disposed to attack them, and partly from the fact that he seems to have “preferred” vegetable food. The hippopotamus is seldom carnivorous, except when driven by extreme hunger, and in no respect is he formed to be a beast of prey.

c. (:21-22) Preeminent Peace and Tranquility

*“Under the lotus plants he lies down,
In the covert of the reeds and the marsh.
22 The lotus plants cover him with shade;
The willows of the brook surround him.”*

Albert Barnes: Referring to his usually **inactive** and **lazy** life. He is disposed to lie down in the shade, and especially in the vegetable growth in marshy places on the banks of lakes and rivers, rather than to dwell in the open field or in the upland forest.

John Hartley: This solidly constructed beast in the *first of God’s ways* (cf. **Prov. 8:22**), i.e., the crown of the animal creation. Because Yahweh is *its Maker*, its power and greatness do not exist in opposition to him. In contrast to mythical thought Yahweh did not have to defeat Behemoth to gain control over the forces of chaos. Rather Behemoth obeyed him from the first moment of its origin. In addition, its imposing form bears witness to the majesty of its Creator. Unafraid, Yahweh *can approach* Behemoth *with his sword*. Such an act symbolizes his complete mastery of this beast.

4. (:23-24) Impressive Power to Neutralize Any Threat

a. (:23) Natural Threats

*“If a river rages, he is not alarmed;
He is confident, though the Jordan rushes to his mouth.”*

b. (:24) Human Threats

*“Can anyone capture him when he is on watch,
With barbs can anyone pierce his nose?”*

John MacArthur: God was not saying this creature lived in the Jordan River, but rather, recognizing that the Jordan was familiar to Job, used it to illustrate how much water this beast could ingest. He could swallow the Jordan! It was a word used to refer to something of **enormous size** and **threatening power**.

John Hartley: The hippopotamus was hunted, but with caution and trepidation. The hunter who captured one of these terrifying creatures was a champion. In popular lore, however, it was considered impossible to capture this great creature. In hunting a hippopotamus a favorite tactic was to pierce its nose so that it must breathe through the mouth; then a fatal blow could be inflicted through its opened mouth. The implication

of Yahweh's questions is that Job dare not hunt, at least alone, such a powerful beast.

B. (41:1-34) Impressive Leviathan – The Ultimate Sea Creature

David Guzik: Usually Leviathan is considered to be a mythical sea-monster or dragon that terrorized sailors and fishermen. Yet in the context of **Job 41**, God does not seem to consider Leviathan to be mythical at all. Some believe that Leviathan describes some ancient dragon-like dinosaur that either survived to Job's day, or survived in the collective memory of mankind, so that God could refer to it as an example. Others consider that in this context, Leviathan is nothing more than a mighty crocodile.

Morgan: Even as Job was **powerless** against Leviathan (as all men are), so he was also powerless against an unleashed Satan set against him. Only God could defeat Leviathan and Satan. Satan may be typified here by behemoth and leviathan. Be that as it may, the question left with Job was this: 'Canst thou?' Thus he was called to the recognition of his own impotence in many directions, and at the same time to a remembrance of the power of God.

Tremper Longman: There is little doubt that in the book of Job, Yahweh is evoking in Job's (and our) imagination the **most fearsome sea creature** that humans can conceive. No real animal can meet the needs of the rhetorical moment. In other words, how awe-inspiring would it be to say that God can control the crocodile? Not much. But to say that God controls the creature that **represents the power of chaos itself** is a dramatic way of speaking of his **greatness** and **strength**.

David Clines: In this depiction of Leviathan the emphasis seems to lie less on Job's inability to master it (**Day, Hartley**) or on Job's helplessness by comparison with it (**Andersen**) as on its **sheer otherness** that lies outside normal human experience.

David Thompson: As we mentioned back in **chapter 3:8**, the name "*Leviathan*" is used three ways in Scripture:

- 1) It is used metaphorically as a reference to Satan (**Isaiah 27:1**);
- 2) It is used symbolically to refer to multi-headed sea monsters (**Ps. 74:13-14**);
- 3) It is used literally as a reference to some massive creature of the sea. (**Ps. 104:24-26; Job 41:1**).

It is quite contextually clear here that God is describing a **literal sea creature**. In fact, God gives us a graphic description of it.

1. (:1-11) Impossibility of Capturing and Controlling It

a. (:1-2) Uncatchable

*"Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?
Or press down his tongue with a cord?
2 Can you put a rope in his nose?
Or pierce his jaw with a hook?"*

Tremper Longman: Leviathan is no ordinary sea creature, and thus he is not caught or controlled like a fish or any other inhabitant of the waters. Leviathan cannot be caught by a conventional fishhook, whether through the mouth (v. 1a) or through the cheek (v. 2b). Its tongue cannot be controlled by a cord or a rope through the nose.

Elmer Smick: The first eight verses are addressed to Job, and they assert that any relationship Job may attempt to have with Leviathan will be doomed to failure—whether by treaty or by force.

b. (:3-4) Untrustworthy – Cannot cut a deal with Leviathan

*“Will he make many supplications to you?
Or will he speak to you soft words?
4 Will he make a covenant with you?
Will you take him for a servant forever?”*

c. (:5-6) Unmanageable

*“Will you play with him as with a bird?
Or will you bind him for your maidens?
Will the traders bargain over him?
Will they divide him among the merchants?”*

Tremper Longman: the sense of v. 5a is that this awesome creature is no more than a rubber ducky in a bathtub to God. Indeed, if he so chose, he could make Leviathan docile enough for young girls (v. 5b).

George Barton: That is, make a pet of him, as one would of a bird.

d. (:7-8) Undefeatable

*“Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
Or his head with fishing spears?
Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle;
you will not do it again!”*

George Barton: One encounter with such a beast is enough; one will not wish to repeat the experience

e. (:9-11) Uncontrollable

*“Behold, your expectation is false;
Will you be laid low even at the sight of him?
No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him;
Who then is he that can stand before Me?
11 Who has given to Me that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.”*

Tremper Longman: Verses 9–11 reiterate that no human—certainly not Job—can control this powerful sea monster. Even the hope of doing so is delusional (v. 9a).

David Guzik: The logical point is made. If Job cannot contend with Leviathan (or even with Satan, whom Leviathan represents), how could he ever hope to stand against the God who made and masters Leviathan? This was another effective way of setting Job in his proper place before God.

2. (:12-24) Impressive Physical Characteristics

a. (:12-17) Impregnable Body Armor

*“I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,
Or his mighty strength, or his orderly frame.
13 Who can strip off his outer armor?
Who can come within his double mail?
14 Who can open the doors of his face?
Around his teeth there is terror.
15 His strong scales are his pride,
Shut up as with a tight seal.
16 One is so near to another,
That no air can come between them.
17 They are joined one to another;
They clasp each other and cannot be separated.”*

John Hartley: Yahweh will not be silent, for he who stops speaking concedes his opponent’s point and the one reduced to silence is the loser (cf. 9:3). He will continue to laud his creation as he waits for Job to respond. Proud of his creature, Yahweh speaks about the union of strength and grace in this marvelous beast. . .

Nothing can pierce its double coat of mail . . . no one can pry open Leviathan’s large mouth. . . Beneath the glistening sun Leviathan’s back looks like rows of shields. Nothing can penetrate its tightly sealed hide.

b. (:18-21) Dragon-like Emanations

*“His sneezes flash forth light,
And his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.
19 Out of his mouth go burning torches;
Sparks of fire leap forth.
20 Out of his nostrils smoke goes forth,
As from a boiling pot and burning rushes.
21 His breath kindles coals,
And a flame goes forth from his mouth.”*

Tremper Longman: Verses 18–21 associate Leviathan with bright light, fire, and smoke. God speaks of the sneezes of Leviathan as producing flashing light. This creature is a fire-breather, and when it sneezes, it involuntarily emits fire. Torches come from its mouth, and its nose is like a smokestack. Here we can reiterate that this is no

crocodile or any other natural creature. This is the epitome of a fearsome sea creature. The ancient Near Eastern imagination could not produce a more fearsome picture, and God easily controls it, while Job and other human creatures can only stand trembling. Its innards are like a “*boiling pot*” and a fire of reeds. Thus when it breathes, it ignites fires.

David Clines: If it is truly the crocodile that is being described, these verses are certainly hyperbolic.

- c. (:22-24) Extraordinary Strength
 *“In his neck lodges strength,
 And dismay leaps before him.
23 The folds of his flesh are joined together,
 Firm on him and immovable.
24 His heart is as hard as a stone;
 Even as hard as a lower millstone.”*

Tremper Longman: Returning to the theme of its impregnable outer covering (see vv. 15–17), God draws Job’s (and the reader’s) attention to the “*folds of its flesh*” (v. 23a). They too cling together. It is “*solidly cast*,” a verb associated with metals. In a word, its skin is like metal, **impenetrable**.

No creature is stronger than its **heart**. If it stops, life ceases. Leviathan’s heart is like a rock, even one as tough as a millstone. Like a millstone, it does not break but grinds others into pieces.

3. (:25-32) Impressive Physical Movement that Endangers Others

- a. (:25) Watch Out When He Raises Up
 *“When he raises himself up, the mighty fear;
 Because of the crashing they are bewildered.”*
- b. (:26-29) Watch Out When He Rebuffs Your Weapons
 *“The sword that reaches him cannot avail;
 Nor the spear, the dart, or the javelin.
27 He regards iron as straw,
 Bronze as rotten wood.
28 The arrow cannot make him flee;
 Slingstones are turned into stubble for him.
29 Clubs are regarded as stubble;
 He laughs at the rattling of the javelin.”*
- c. (:30) Watch Out When He Runs You Over
 *“His underparts are like sharp potsherds;
 He spreads out like a threshing sledge on the mire.”*

John Hartley: When Leviathan moves along the bank of the river, *it leaves marks in the mud like a threshing sledge*. This implement, constructed out of two boards with pieces of basalt or flint attached to its underside was used to crush grain (cf. Rowley). These marks left by Leviathan give the impression that *its undersides* are composed of *sharp, rough potsherds*.

Tremper Longman: **Verse 30** again describes the **hardness** of Leviathan's outer skin, or perhaps even more accurately described, "*outer shell*." But now Job learns that this outer shell is not just protective but also capable of killing on its own. Sharp potsherds (broken pieces of a pot) can lacerate and kill. To be run over by Leviathan would be like being run over by a threshing sledge.

- d. (:31-32) Watch Out When He Moves Through the Water
*"He makes the depths boil like a pot;
He makes the sea like a jar of ointment.
32 "Behind him he makes a wake to shine;
One would think the deep to be gray-haired."*

Tremper Longman: **Verses 31–32** now depict the effect of its **movement on the water**. The description seems to emphasize the **speed** and **size** of the creature. It may also suggest the heat generated by this fire-breather. After all, it is capable of making the waters boil. But when it cuts through the waves, it makes the waters smooth, like a big ship that cuts through the waves. It leaves a white trail behind it, again like a large ship.

4. (:33-34) Summary of Supremacy and Dominion
*"Nothing on earth is like him,
One made without fear.
34 He looks on everything that is high;
He is king over all the sons of pride."*

David Guzik: This description of Leviathan – especially at this point – is so like that of **Satan**, that we may fairly suppose that God here was indicating to Job not only His great might and Job's vulnerability before Satan, but also **alluding to Satan's role in Job's great crisis**.

God called Job to consider these unconquerable beasts, who each in their own way were **examples of Satan and his power**. In this, God allowed Job to consider the fact that he could not stand before the power of Satan without God empowering him. Job thought that he was all alone through his ordeal; indeed he felt he was alone. Yet this was God's way of saying that **he was not alone**, because if he were, then he surely would have crumbled before the power of Leviathan and Behemoth.

Elmer Smick: It was important that God did not tell Job the reasons why; then Job can be a continuing comfort and inspiration and example to those who suffer without an explanation. "Once again we emphasize that if the specific and ultimate reason for his suffering had been revealed to Job – even at this point – the value of the account as a

comfort to others who must suffer in ignorance would have been diminished if not cancelled.

John Hartley: This fearless creature cannot be intimidated. Since Yahweh made all earthly creatures to fear before mankind (**Gen. 9:2**), the fact that Leviathan is without fear indicates that it is a primordial creature. Even all who are high i.e., the great rulers, fear it. Leviathan is the king over all that are proud. Yahweh's argument is that since no human being can subject Leviathan, surely then no person can ever be so mighty or exalted as to challenge successfully Yahweh's rule.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When has God had to put you in your place?
- 2) How did the Lord demonstrate compassion and patience in Job's situation?
- 3) What can we learn from how children challenge their parents in inappropriate ways?
- 4) What do you think Job thought was God's intention for inflicting such severe suffering on him?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Constable: Those who prefer the **mythical monster** interpretation do so mainly because Leviathan almost certainly describes a mythical creature in **3:8**, **Psalms 74:14**, and **Isaiah 27:1**, and perhaps elsewhere in Scripture. Also, the description of Leviathan in **41:18-22** seems to picture an unreal sea monster. Furthermore, there are similar descriptions of this sea monster in ancient Near Eastern myths.

Nevertheless, it seems to many of the commentators, and to me, that Leviathan here, but not everywhere in Scripture, describes a **real animal**— for the following reasons: The details of the description seem to picture a real animal. Moreover, both Behemoth and Leviathan occur elsewhere in Scripture apart from mythical connotations (e.g., **Joel 1:20** where the Hebrew word translated "*Behemoth*" in **Job 40:15** reads "*animals*"). Additionally, Scripture states that God created Behemoth (**Job 40:15**) and Leviathan (**Ps. 104:26**).

David Clines: This second speech of Yahweh has contained two unequal, and unlike, parts. The first (**40:7–14**) has been a frankly **unattractive baiting of Job**, a **sarcastic challenge** to him to dress up like a god, and act like the kind of god he expects the universal ruler to be, executing absolute authority and sweeping away the wicked from the world. There has been an edge in this reproof of Job that we did not hear in the first

speech, almost a bitterness. Yahweh has been needled, as well he might be, by Job's unambiguous and reiterated charges that he does not know how to do his job. It has not helped matters that after the first divine speech Job has not capitulated. Yahweh cannot forbear from saying to Job, **Well, let's see you do it better!** He does not mean that it would be too difficult, even for him, to carry out the kind of program of extermination of the wicked that Job has in mind, but rather that Job has no idea what he is asking. It has not been Yahweh's way in these speeches to spend much time on pointing out where Job is wrong; he has been much more interested in expounding his own vision of the cosmos. But here at least he confronts Job's notion of justice head-on, and says, implicitly, Feel free to do it your way; it is not my way of managing the universe. Job is of course powerless to "*crush the wicked where they stand*" (40:12) and therefore his criticisms of Yahweh will not wash.

Baxter: These, then, are the main significances of the speech from the whirlwind: Job was not meant to know the explanation of his sufferings; but God was concerned and sympathetic; the Divine purpose was that Job should **rest in God Himself**, apart from explanations; also that Job should come to the end of his self-ism and find his all in God.

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

By questioning Job about the primordial monsters Behemoth and Leviathan, Yahweh is trying to persuade Job that he is Master of all powers in the world, both earthly and cosmic. Certainly then he is Lord of all forces, earthly and cosmic, that brought on Job's affliction. Therefore, if Job is to find Yahweh's favor again, he must submit to Yahweh as his Lord by relinquishing his avowal of innocence and by conceding his complaints against Yahweh's just governance of the world. Yahweh is thus calling Job to decide whether to argue his case and lose or submit to Yahweh, accepting in trust the blessing and the curse, the riches and the ash heap.

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

Here, if we have rightly found the heart of the theology of the whole book, is a very great depth. There is a rebuke in it for any person who, by complaining about particular events in his life, implies that he could propose to God better ways of running the universe than those God currently uses. . . . The reality of God's goodness lies beyond justice. This is why the categories of guilt and punishment, true and terrible though they are, can only view human suffering as a consequence of sin not as an occasion of grace.

Elmer Smick: But now that the contest is over, God still does not reveal his reason to Job. Job does not find out what the readers know. That is why Job can be restored without destroying the integrity of the account. To understand this is to understand why the forces of moral disorder are veiled underneath mythopoeic language about ferocious, uncontrollable creatures. Once again I emphasize that if the specific and ultimate reason for his suffering had been revealed to Job even at this point, the value of the account as a comfort to others who must suffer in ignorance would have been diminished, if not cancelled.

TEXT: Job 42:1-6

TITLE: *JOB RESPONDS IN HUMBLE REPENTANCE*

BIG IDEA:

AN APPRECIATION OF GOD'S PERSON AND SOVEREIGN WORKING IN OUR LIVES (HIS POWER AND HIS WISDOM) REMOVES ALL PRESUMPTION AND PRIDE

INTRODUCTION:

Francis Andersen: Job is satisfied. His vision of God has been expanded beyond all previous bounds. He has a new appreciation of the scope and harmony of God's world, of which he is but a small part. But this discovery does not make him feel insignificant. Just by looking at ordinary things, he realizes that he cannot even begin to imagine what it must be like to be God. The world is beautiful and terrifying, and in it all God is everywhere, seen to be powerful and wise, and more mysterious when he is known than when he is but dimly discerned. The Lord has spoken to Job. That fact alone is marvelous beyond all wonder. Job has grown in wisdom. He is at once delighted and ashamed.

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

John Hartley: Contritely confessing that he has spoken beyond his knowledge (**vv. 2-3**), Job submits himself to the God who has appeared to him (**vv. 4-6**). This short passage blends together many genres: a confession of God's power and wisdom (**v. 2**), an admission of limited knowledge (**v. 3**), an invitation to dispute a case (**v. 4**), an acknowledgment of Yahweh's appearing (**v. 5**) and a recantation (**v. 6**). . .

Filled with wonder and awe at Yahweh's appearing, Job confesses his own unworthiness. His attention shifts from his concern for vindication to his need to prepare his heart before God. The integrity of Job's faith shines brightly. He humbles himself before God because communion with God is more important to him than release from his affliction. It has not been wrong for him to complain even against God himself. Nor has it been wrong for him to swear an oath of innocence. But the zealous pursuit of a right eventually erects a barrier between God and the offended person. Therefore, when God makes himself known, the suppliant must surrender everything to God, including his just grievances, if he is to avoid sinning and to find God's favor again. Thus Job renounces all personal claims that could be construed to put himself above God. In humility he glorifies God.

David Clines: This short speech, though longer than Job's previous speech (40:4–5), obviously constitutes a single strophe. Its structure is **threefold**:

- (1) Job acknowledges the omnipotence of Yahweh (v 2),
- (2) he accepts that he has intruded into an area in which he has no competence (v 3), and
- (3) having heard Yahweh's speeches, he abandons his case against God and determines to resume his normal life (vv 4–6).

The second and third elements each begin with a quotation of words of Yahweh, to which Job responds. The first element does not begin with a quotation, and so may be seen as Job's response to the divine speeches as a whole, which have just now concluded.

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

I believe that Job admitted sinning because he suffered, but he did not admit that he was suffering because he had sinned. Job forgot his cry for vindication since he had received something much better: a revelation of the person of God and renewed fellowship with God. He had lost all, but he had **found God** and was now content. He had stopped asking, "Why?" since he had come to know God. We do not need to know why if we know God. Or, to put it another way, "**Knowing God is better than knowing answers.**" This is one of the great lessons of this book.

Cyril Barber: In these verses Job repents of his stubbornness and pride, and finds peace and contentment in the knowledge that God accepts him. He has learned that God is not only in control of the world and everything in it, but also our lives. And His love for us, which far exceeds our comprehension, is undiminished by the harsh realities of life.

(:1) PROLOGUE

"Then Job answered the LORD, and said,"

I. (:2) CONFESSION OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY – TWO COMPONENTS

A. Confession of God's Power

"I know that Thou canst do all things,"

John Hartley: Throughout his speeches Job has held firmly to his conviction that God is all-powerful. In his lamenting, however, he has questioned God's consistent execution of justice in the face of numerous examples that seem to contradict the standard of justice. Nevertheless Yahweh's words have reaffirmed Job's conviction of his wise and judicious governance of the world.

B. Confession of God's Wisdom

"And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."

John Hartley: Job's concession means that he believes that everything occurring on earth takes place within the framework of the divine wisdom. No hostile force, be it earthly or heavenly, prevents God from carrying out his purpose.

Elmer Smick: Job's immediate response (v.1) shows that he understands clearly the thrust of the second divine speech. As I noted in the opening comments on that speech, the prologue (40:8–14) sets the tone—that God is all-powerful, especially as Lord over the moral sphere. He alone puts down evil and brings to pass his entire holy will. This, as I have tried to show, is the thought also of the climax (apex) of the Leviathan poem (cf. 41:11–12).

David Clines: he is a mere mortal, unfitted by capacity or knowledge for the management of the universe; as he has said already, in comparison with Yahweh, he is of little account (40:4). So there is a **concessive note** here: he will not resist the divine move to put him in his place and to underline his creatureliness.

II. (:3) CONFESSION OF HUMAN PRESUMPTION AND PRIDE

A. (:3a) Pride

"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?"

Tremper Longman: In v. 3a he quotes God's statement (with some variation) that began his speeches (see 38:3). Job thus admits that he is indeed a person who has "*hidden*," in the sense of **obscuring**, knowledge. He has not clarified matters by his questioning of God, but rather he has made the situation more difficult. In addition, he has not done so intelligently, but "*without knowledge*."

Through God's constant questioning, Job came to realize the limits of his wisdom and knowledge. He tried to claim a knowledge of the workings of the universe that were vastly beyond him. If he cannot even fathom the **natural world** (as God's questions in **chaps. 38–41** indicated, and Job's quotation of God's statement in v. 4 [see 38:3 again] evokes), how could he possibly pontificate about the **moral universe**?

David Thompson: Job was not in any position to **instruct God** concerning anything. Instead of demanding some confrontation with God, he should have asked God for instruction and guidance through the trials. Since God had sovereignly permitted these things to come into Job's life, Job could learn from them.

Albert Barnes: He acknowledges that he "had" entertained and expressed such views of God as were in fact clothing the whole subject in darkness instead of explaining it. The meaning is, "*Who indeed is it, as thou saidst, that undertakes to judge of great and profound purposes without knowledge? I am that presumptuous man?*"

B. (:3b) Presumption

*"Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."*

John Hartley: Having been confronted by the amazing way God has created the world, Job admits that matters are too wonderful for him to understand. He comes to realize that the divine wisdom is beyond the ability of any human being to grasp. In faith based on Yahweh's words, Job acknowledges that Yahweh is true to justice in his governance of the cosmos. He expresses his submission to God's sovereignty by recasting Yahweh's opening accusation (**38:2**) into a self-judgment. This fact confirms that Job is responding to Yahweh's speeches. In his complaints that God rules unjustly he admits that he has spoken beyond his knowledge and insight. He has approached the sin of hubris by claiming to have better insight than God into matters on earth. . .

His self-confidence has compelled him to defend his innocence vigorously. In his strong complaints against God, he has moved dangerously close to pride, i.e., being certain that he is able to judge God. Should Job persist in holding on to his avowal of innocence, he would sin by yielding to pride. But on becoming aware of the danger inherent in continuing to charge God with injustice, he humbles himself before God, conceding that he has misstated his case by speaking about things beyond his ability to know. In taking this path Job confirms that humility is essential for a vital relationship with God. With this concession Job demonstrates that he serves God for himself alone and not for any personal gain or benefit, not even his own justification. Yahweh's confidence in his servant in the face of the Satan's challenge has been completely vindicated.

David Clines: All Job has been speaking of are the principles on which the world is, or should be, governed; he thought they were pretty straightforward matters of justice and fairness, but the way Yahweh tells it, everything in the world is a **marvel**, and Job had better accept that justice and fairness too, like the structure of the physical universe, and the ways of Yahweh in rain and wind, are "marvels" beyond his comprehension or understanding. Redefining cosmic justice as a "marvel" puts it outside any realm that humans can access or have rights in. "**A confession of ignorance is appropriate when man is faced by divine mysteries**" (**Dhorme**), and Job has to confess that he knows nothing, understands nothing now that it is clear that justice is one of those "marvels" or divine mysteries.

Derek Kidner: **John Calvin** made the point, in the opening sentence of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that all the wisdom we ever need to know is to be found in knowing God and knowing ourselves. That just about sums up what Job has learned in trial.

III. (:4-6) REPENTANCE THAT HUMBLER ONESELF IN SUBMISSION BEFORE GOD

A. (:4) Desire for Divine Instruction

*“Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask Thee, and do Thou instruct me.”*

Roy Zuck: Again Job quoted the Lord, this time citing God’s challenge at the beginning of each of His two speeches (38:3; 40:7): *I will question you, and you shall answer Me.* This quotation implied an admission that Job was unable to answer any of the Sovereign’s barrage of rhetorical questions. Job admitted to flunking God’s biology examinations.

Albert Barnes: Job was not now disposed to debate the matter, or to enter into a controversy with God. He was willing to sit down and **receive instruction** from God, and earnestly desired that he would “*teach*” him of his ways. It should be added, that very respectable critics suppose that in this verse Job designs to make confession of the impropriety of his language on former occasions, in the presumptuous and irreverent manner in which he had demanded a trial of argument with God.

B. (:5) Delight in Renewed Vision of God

*“I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees Thee;”*

John Hartley: Now he has a far superior basis for faith – *now my eyes have seen* Yahweh! Job had a direct encounter with the living God and heard him speak clearly. Yahweh veiled himself in a tempest, which resembles in many respects his appearance at Sinai (Exod. 19) so that Job was not consumed by his holiness. His presence, however, was so unmistakably real that Job could say *now my eyes have seen you*. His deepest longing – to behold his Redeemer with his own eyes – has been fulfilled (19:25-27). The vision of Yahweh overwhelms him, filling him with a sense of wonder and awe and reducing all his complaints to insignificance. In appearing to his servant, Yahweh vindicates Job’s integrity (**Habel**, OTL).

C. (:6) Despising All Pride and Presumption

*“Therefore I retract,
And I repent in dust and ashes.”*

Peter Wallace: The verb here, “*ma’as*,” means to *reject, refuse, or despise*. It is the word God used when he rejected Saul as king over Israel. It is commonly used when God is rejecting Israel – or when Israel is rejecting God! It normally requires a direct object, but here there is none: The simplest, most wooden translation of **verse 6** would be: “*Therefore I reject and I repent on dust and ashes.*” **So what does Job reject?** If we take God’s speeches at face value, and therefore, if God is answering Job’s complaint, then when Job says “*I reject*” it would appear that he is saying, **I withdraw my complaint!**

Thomas Constable: The Hebrew word translated “*retract*” (v. 6) means to “*despise*” or “*reject*.” Job evidently not only withdrew his charges against God but also despised and rejected his attitude of **pride**.

Tremper Longman: In a word, he repents of the growing bitterness of his spirit and his accusations that God was unjust. He turns away from his earlier intention to bring charges against God for treating him unfairly.

Elmer Smick: Job's integrity has been vindicated. Job does not need to repent over sins that brought on his suffering since his suffering is not the result of his sin. One should not, however, assume that Job has nothing to be sorry for. His questioning of God's justice, for which God chided him in **38:2** (quoted in **v.3**), is enough to call forth a **change of heart and mind**.

Francis Andersen: Job could be expressing regret at his foolish words, uttered hastily and in ignorance – a fault deserving correction, but not a wickedness deserving punishment.

Roy Zuck: Having gained insight (**v. 5**) into God's ways and character – His creative power and genius, His sovereign control, and His providential care and love – Job confessed his own unworthiness and repented. *I despise myself* means he rejected his former accusations of God spoken in pride. God had already rebuked Job for indicting, faulting, and discrediting Him (**40:2**).

Albert Barnes: The sense here is, that Job meant to give expression to the profoundest and sincerest feelings of penitence for his sins. From this effect produced on his mind by the address of the Almighty, we may learn the following lessons:

(1) That a correct view of the character and presence of God is adapted to produce humility and penitence; compare **Job 40:4-5**. This effect was produced on the mind of Peter when, astonished by a miracle performed by the Savior which none but a divine being could have done, he said, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;*" **Luke 5:8**. The same effect; was produced on the mind of Isaiah after he had seen Yahweh of Hosts in the temple: "*Then said I, Wo is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts;*" **Isaiah 6:5**. No man can have any elevated views of his own importance or purity, who has right apprehensions of the holiness of his Creator.

(2) Such a view of the presence of God will produce what no argument can in causing penitence and humility. The friends of Job had reasoned with him in vain to secure just this state of mind; they had endeavored to convince him that he was a great sinner, and "ought" to exercise repentance. But he met argument with argument; and all their arguments, denunciations, and appeals, made no impression on his mind. When, however, God manifested himself to him, he was melted into contrition, and was ready to make the most penitent and humble confession. So it is now. The arguments of a preacher or a friend often make no impression on the mind of a sinner. He can guard himself against them. He can meet argument with argument, or can coolly turn the ear away. But he has no such power to resist God, and when "he" manifests himself to the

soul, the heart is subdued, and the proud and self-confident unbeliever becomes humbled, and sues for mercy.

(3) A good man will be willing to confess that he is vile, when he has any clear views of God. He will be so affected with a sense of the majesty and holiness of his Maker, that he will be overwhelmed with a sense of his own unworthiness.

(4) The most holy men may have occasion to repent of their **presumptuous manner** of speaking of God. We all err in the same way in which Job did. We reason about God with irreverence; we speak of his government as if we could comprehend it; we discourse of him as if he were an equal; and when we come to have any just views of him, we see that there has been **much improper boldness, much self-confidence, much irreverence of thought and manner, in our estimation of the divine wisdom and plans**. The bitter experience of Job should lead us to the utmost carefulness in the manner in which we speak of our Maker.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How have you grown in your view of Who God Is? and your resulting perspective on Who You Are?
- 2) Why are both power and wisdom necessary components of God's sovereignty?
- 3) Why is a submissive attitude towards receiving instruction from the Lord so critical?
- 4) How would you define the substance of Job's repentance and how did that differ from the type of repentance demanded by the three counsellors?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Atkinson: We must not read this as though Job has at last given in to Zophar's plea that he should repent of his sins. This is not the point. Job has not been overawed by God and humiliated. He has been overwhelmed by the gracious divine presence, and humbly bows his head.

Roy Zuck: In Job's first response (**40:3-5**) he admitted his finiteness in the face of God's display of numerous wonders of nature above, on, and under the earth. But he did not admit to God's sovereignty or to his own sin of pride. Job now confessed those two things in his second reply. Overwhelmed by the strength and fierceness of the behemoth and the leviathan, Job sensed his own inadequacy to conquer and control evil, which they represented. He therefore saw anew the greatness of God's power and sovereignty.

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

To Job the supremely important thing is that **God has come to him in his suffering**, showing him that he is not isolated from God by his suffering. He has cried for God again and again, and God has come to him, not to enter into debate with him on the issues he has thrashed out with his friends, but to show him that now, when he most needs God, **God is with him**. ... It is of the essence of its [the book's] message that Job **found God in his suffering**, and so found relief not from his misfortunes, but in them.

David Thompson: So just exactly what is it of which Job repented? The answer to this question is his **shallow theological perspective** of God. Job was a faithful man who feared God, but he was shallow in his doctrine and God used these events and His discussion to bring Job to see his faulty perspective. God used a few illustrations from His creation to prove to Job that Job has no idea what God is doing. Job cannot even begin to understand God nor can he possibly know all of the powerful things God does in His sovereign program. There were deep mysteries of God being unfolded here.

GOD SOVEREIGNLY PERMITS NEGATIVE THINGS TO COME INTO OUR LIFE FOR HIS MYSTERIOUS PURPOSES AND WHEN WE FINALLY COME TO THE POINT WHERE WE TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY TRUST GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND NOT QUESTION THEM, WE HAVE LEARNED THE LESSON GOD WANTS US TO LEARN AND ARE BECOMING MANLY IN OUR SPIRITUALITY.

This was the lesson Job learned. When God described just a few things of His creation, which Job could not even begin to explain or know, Job realized how foolish he had been in daring to challenge and question God. Job already "*feared God*" (1:1), but his "fear" was taken to an entirely different level here. God was using these terrible things to make a powerful statement to His angels and to Satan but in the process of all of this, He was developing Job's theology. He was taking him to a deep level in his relationship with God.

Lessons to be learned:

1. God can do all things, so if He isn't doing what we want Him to, He has His reasons and we need to remain faithful and trust Him.
2. No one will stop or shortchange the plan or program of God. When God has accomplished what He is accomplishing, His program and plan will move forward.
3. When we don't know what God is doing, we need to shut our mouths and trust our God.
4. We need to make certain that what we hear about God actually squares with what we see in His completed Word.
5. If we have said stupid things concerning God, we need to admit it to Him.

TEXT: Job 42:7-17

TITLE: THE OUTCOME: JOB VINDICATED AND RESTORED

BIG IDEA:

THE END OF THE STORY SEES JOB VINDICATED AND RESTORED

INTRODUCTION:

Francis Andersen: The gifts at the end are gestures of grace, not rewards for virtue. It is an artistic, indeed a theological fitness, if not necessity, that Job's vindication be not just a personal and hidden reconciliation with God in the secret of his soul, but also visible, material, historical, in terms of his life as a man. It was already a kind of resurrection in flesh, as much as the Old Testament could know.

Elmer Smick: Job has learned that humans by themselves cannot deduce the reason why anyone suffers. Still unknown to Job is the fact that his suffering has been used by God to vindicate God's trust in him over against the accusations of the Accuser. So without anger toward him, God has allowed Job to suffer in order to humiliate the Accuser and to provide support to countless sufferers who would follow in Job's footsteps. Once the purpose of the book has been fulfilled, Job's suffering cannot continue without God's being capricious. We see here the heart of the difference between the suffering of the wicked as punishment and of the righteous to accomplish God's higher purpose.

Job's **lavish restoration** (double all he had) is not based on Job's righteousness but on God's love for him as one who has suffered the loss of all things for God's sake and for no other reason. Here Job joins the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53**, who, "*after the suffering of his soul,*" sees "*the light of life*" and is given "*a portion among the great*" and "*will divide the spoils with the strong*" (**Isa 53:11–12**).

Tremper Longman: Declaring Job right, God expresses his displeasure with the three friends. He allows them a way out by having Job himself intercede for them and offer sacrifices on their behalf (likely implying a repentant heart on their part). The three friends do as God instructs them, and Job prays for them.

Interestingly, Job's restoration is tied to his intercession on behalf of his friends. When he prayed for them, then God restored him to his previous prosperity and happiness. Indeed, his new condition surpassed his earlier situation. He died an old and happy man, leaving behind a large, prosperous family.

Charles Swindoll: There is something deeply satisfying about justice. We love it when right is rewarded and wrong is punished. The old axiom, "Justice is truth in action" explains our love for it; what is fair finally occurs.

On one is better at justice than the Living God, who is not only all-knowing. He is completely fair and absolutely righteous. When His justice finally arrives, it was worth the wait. That wait can seem interminably long. But never doubt it: Regardless of how long or short the wait – the Lord is just. Even though all God’s accounts are not settled at the end of each month, they will be settled. Justice is an essential ingredient of His character; He not only will not ignore it . . . He cannot.

Justice is worth waiting for. God is a God of justice. He will faithfully bring it to pass – if not now, later. If not later, in eternity. God will make it right. His fairness is part of His veracity. God, who patiently allowed this most unusual experiment with Job to run its course, has now brought it to completion. His servant has been rewarded. These friends have been brought to their knees. Best of all, Satan has been silenced and proved wrong (again!). And the Lord is still enthroned, in charge, and fully glorified.

(:7a) PROLOGUE

*“And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job,
that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite,”*

Cyril Barber: Elihu was not included with Job’s three friends, perhaps because his speeches to Job were nearer the truth.

I. (:7b-9) JOB VINDICATED – YAHWEH’S VERDICT

Francis Andersen: Their roles are reversed! In the course of their speeches, not one of them even hinted that they, not Job, might be the object of God’s wrath (7) and in need of his grace. Now they discover (it is a delightful irony) that unless they can secure the patronage of Job (the very one they had treated as in such need of their spiritual resources), they might not escape the divine displeasure. The effective prayer of a righteous man to turn away God’s anger from the wicked (cf. **Gen. 18**) adds another meaning to Job’s suffering that no one had thought of.

A. (:7b) God Rebukes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

*“My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends,
because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has.”*

Elmer Smick: “*what is right*” -- The counselors certainly lacked the right information about why Job was suffering. Job spoke without understanding (**v.3**) and was often fiery and emotional in his remarks (**15:12–13; 18:4**). His opinions and feelings were often wrong, but **his facts were right**. He was not being punished for sins he had committed. But the friends were claiming to know for certain things they did not know and so were falsely accusing Job while mouthing beautiful words about God. Job rightly accused them of lying about him and trying to flatter God (**13:4, 7–11**).

Tremper Longman: In the final analysis, it appears that God is including Job's repentance in his declaration that Job did *what was right*. He repented, and now the three friends need to repent.

David Atkinson: "*my servant*" – The sacrifice was made and the prayer offered by the one who was called "*my servant*." This recalls unmistakably the theme we have noticed before from the prophet Isaiah in his Servant Songs and elsewhere. The servant stands in place of the people before God, bringing a sacrifice of atonement, consecration and offering, and praying for God's mercy and grace. Once again, the book of Job is pointing beyond itself to the Mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as an offering for sins, and now ever lives to make intercession for us.

Many times the book of Job has illustrated themes which come to clearer focus and richer colour in the life and suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

David Clines: Yahweh now says that Job has spoken of him "*what is right*" (vv 7, 8). Now, in the divine speeches, Yahweh had castigated Job for obscuring the divine plan (38:2) in not recognizing that retribution is not built into the world order as designed by its creator. But now he allows that Job has been right in asserting that the principle of retribution does not operate. Job had thought it should, though it did not; Yahweh had intended that it should not, and of course it did not. So in one respect Yahweh and Job are at loggerheads, and in another they are in harmony. That is the simple resolution of the crucial issue that has so bedeviled the relations between Yahweh and Job. And it has crept up on the readers in this form of a subordinate clause in Yahweh's closing address to the friends.

B. (:8) Intercession of Job

1. Burnt Offering Commanded

*"Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams,
and go to My servant Job,
and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves,"*

David Clines: The number of seven bulls and seven rams in atonement for the wrongdoing of the three friends is an astonishingly high one. We might compare the seven bulls and seven rams offered for the whole people of Israel on each of the seven days of Passover, according to Ezekiel's cultic calendar (**Ezek 45:23**). We find a sacrifice of seven bulls and seven rams in three other places in the Hebrew Bible:

- In the narrative of Balaam and Balak (**Num 23:1, 29**),
- At the installation of the ark of the covenant in David's time (**1 Chr 15:26**)
- And at the cleansing of the temple in Hezekiah's time (**2 Chr 29:21**).

On all these occasions the stakes are much higher than they are in the case of Job's friends.

John MacArthur: Since this was the number of sacrifices specified in **Numbers 23:1** by Balaam the prophet, it was perhaps a traditional kind of burnt offering for sin.

Elmer Smick: Since God had a high purpose for Job's suffering, the counselors made themselves **enemies of God** by accusing Job. The large sacrifice (v.8) shows how grave the Lord considered their sin. Grave as it was, he accepts Job's intercession (lit., "*lifted up Job's face*"). Job, who might have held a grudge, does not fail to love those who spitefully abused him when he was most helpless. This lofty and practical truth is a fitting theological finale to a book that calls forth a rigorous exercise of both soul and mind.

2. Intercessory Prayer Offered

"and My servant Job will pray for you."

Tremper Longman: That no priest is mentioned is a further indication that we are dealing with an early (pre-Mosaic) setting to the action of the book. These patriarchs could offer their own sacrifices, but they need a **mediator**, according to God, none other than Job himself. We might remember here that Job served as a priest-like mediator for his children early in the book as well (1:5). Job will stand in the breach for them as Moses did for the Israelites after their sin with the golden calf (**Exod. 32:11–14**). By making the three friends go and seek Job's prayers, God makes clear to them and to the reader that their retribution theology is wrongheaded. They must seek Job's forgiveness as well as God's.

3. Divine Acceptance Promised

*"For I will accept him
so that I may not do with you according to your folly,
because you have not spoken of Me what is right,
as My servant Job has."*

C. (:9) Obedience and Divine Acceptance

1. Obedience Fulfilled

"So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them;"

Charles Swindoll: What a grand scene! You know what is happening? Sins are being forgiven. Guilt is being removed. Harsh feelings are being forgotten. Grudges are being erased. That's what happens when justice and mercy are blended.

How beautifully this portrays what happened at the Cross. That's why the death of Christ is called efficacious. It is effective, because God's justice against sin was once and for all satisfied in the death of the Lamb. And as a result, God's mercy is released in the forgiveness of those who trust in the Lamb. And we are then set free. Free at last.

2. Divine Acceptance Extended

"and the LORD accepted Job."

II. (:10-17) JOB RESTORED – GOD RESTORES JOB’S FORTUNE, FAMILY AND FULLNESS OF LIFE

A. (:10-12) Restoration of Job’s Fortune

1. (:10) Gracious Doubling of Prosperity

“And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold.”

Tremper Longman: He is never told why he suffers, but he has now learned to submit himself to **God’s sovereign power and wisdom**. He does so with no promise from God that he will be restored, thus also demonstrating that Job does indeed fear God “*for no good reason*,” contrary to what the accuser had charged (1:9). 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 has 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.

David Clines: Job’s restoration does not come about overnight. Ten children have yet to be born to him over the course of a decade or more, and the vast herds of livestock will not miraculously appear on his grazing lands; they must accumulate according to the natural order of things.

2. (:11) Family Encouragement and Enrichment

“Then all his brothers, and all his sisters, and all who had known him before, came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold.”

Cyril Barber: 42:11 adds a very human touch. None of these friends and/or relatives had come to visit Job during his protracted illness.

Elmer Smick: Job’s relatives, who kept their distance from the spectacle of suffering (19:13–15), here prove themselves to be **fair-weather friends**. Their comforting and consoling come a little late, but their presents are expensive (v.11): a “*ring of gold*” (for the nose [Ge 24:47; Isa 3:21] or the ears [Ge 35:4; Ex 32:2]) and a “*piece of silver*” (*qesîṭâ*). The latter is not money in the sense of coinage but an early designation of weight, like the shekel.

Izak Cornelius: “*Piece of silver*” is *qesîṭâ*; these are not coins but pieces of silver used in business transactions. Gold is depicted as rings in Egyptian art and worn as jewelry. Achan’s loot included a wedge of gold (Jos. 7:20–21).

3. (:12) Extensive Possessions – Doubling Up in Each Category

*“And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning,
and he had 14,000 sheep,
and 6,000 camels,
and 1,000 yoke of oxen,
and 1,000 female donkeys.”*

B. (:13-15) Restoration of Job’s Family

1. (:13) Quiver Restocked

“And he had seven sons and three daughters.”

Cyril Barber: Only the number of children remains the same as before (cf. **1:19**), for Job fully expected to be reunited with those whom he had lost in the resurrection (cf. **19:26**).

2. (:14) Pleasant Names

*“And he named the first Jemimah,
and the second Keziah,
and the third Keren-happuch.”*

Elmer Smick: Their names are indicative of their beauty:

- Jemimah means “*turtledove*”;
- Keziah is probably an aromatic plant as in the name cinnamon (“*cassia*” in **Ps 45:8**); and
- Keren-Happuch means “*a jar [horn] of eye paint*.”

3. (:15) Privileged Daughters

a. In Terms of Beauty

*“And in all the land no women were found so fair
as Job's daughters;”*

b. In Terms of Inheritance

*“and their father gave them inheritance
among their brothers.”*

Tremper Longman: With these names, we are not surprised to hear that “*there could not be found in the land women more beautiful than the daughters of Job*” (**42:15**). They were not only beautiful but rich since Job gave them an inheritance, not typical in an ancient Near Eastern society. Job would have no problem finding husbands for these exceptional daughters.

C. (:16-17) Restoration of Job’s Fullness of life

1. (:16a) Long Life

“And after this Job lived 140 years,”

Francis Andersen: Analogy has suggested from his additional *hundred and forty years* (**16**) that Job was seventy when the story began, but this is a speculation.

2. (:16b) Extensive Progeny

“and saw his sons, and his grandsons, four generations.”

Izak Cornelius: Joseph (**Gen. 50:23**) saw his grandchildren to the third generation, Job to the fourth! The phrase *“and so he died, old and full of years”* (**Job 42:17**) is also used for Abraham, Isaac, and David (**Gen. 25:8; 35:29; 1 Chr. 29:8**).

3. (:17) Fulfilled Life

“And Job died, an old man and full of days.”

Elmer Smick: the patriarchal formula *“old and full of years”* expresses a completely fulfilled life (cf. **Ge 25:8; 35:29**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you surprised that God says that Job has spoken *what is right*? How surprised were Job’s counsellors when the tables were turned against them?
- 2) Are you able to love those who have opposed you and caused you heartache?
- 3) Why are such key figures as Satan, Job’s wife and Elihu not mentioned in this wrap-up chapter?
- 4) How can we apply the lessons which Job learned to situations where there is no apparent resolution and renewed blessing in this life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Hartley: Although Job has experienced excruciating suffering, he has persevered until he has found full reconciliation with Yahweh. Throughout the entire ordeal Job has shown that he serves Yahweh from a pure heart. He trusts Yahweh for no ulterior motive, but solely for Yahweh’s presence in his life. So when he is given the opportunity, he mercifully prays for his three friends, whose tirades have increased his suffering. The fact that Yahweh has Job intercede for the comforters indicates that Job has gained spiritual authority for having endured undeserved suffering and then yielding his complaint to God. . .

In the framework of the whole book, Yahweh is the giver of life and blessing, not a capricious tyrant who takes pleasure in the suffering of those who serve him merely to

test their loyalty. Yahweh may withdraw his favor for a season, but his love is for a lifetime.

Ben Reaach: There are many **additional questions** we might have that are left unanswered in this conclusion. A few key characters are not mentioned in these verses. There's no mention of **Satan** who featured prominently in the opening chapters of the book. We might expect that there would be some kind of public proclamation that Satan had been wrong. But we don't see that here. There's no record of Job being told about those conversations between the Lord and Satan. Another character who is conspicuously absent in the closing of the book is **Job's wife**. We're told that Job sires a new family, and we may assume that he does so with the wife who was mentioned at the beginning of the book. But we're not told that for sure. And then **Elihu** is also missing here. The three friends are rebuked, but not Elihu. And this may point to the fact that Elihu was more accurate in his comments than the others.

But even though this epilogue to the book may not satisfy our curiosity in every way, it does tell us what is important. It reveals to us the details of the story that are relevant to understanding the lessons for us in this story. . .

We know that many situations are not resolved in this way. Many trials continue all the way to the end of life. The pain of losing a loved one, financial hardship, sickness, broken relationships. These things do not always find a happy resolution in this life. . .

We can anticipate the eternal blessings we will have in our heavenly home. All our trials will end someday. Maybe not in the here and now, but they will end. And we will dwell forever in heaven, where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (**Revelation 21:4**).

And this, I believe, is what the ending of Job is pointing to. It's not to hold out the hope of material prosperity. But it is to hold out the hope that **our suffering will one day end**, and **God will graciously and abundantly bless us** beyond what we could even ask or think. **We will dwell with Him**, and we will be blessed by Him forever and ever. **Derek Thomas** sums it up well by saying, "There is no guarantee, this side of eternity, that Job's pattern will be anyone else's. Some are asked to carry their sorrows to the grave (but no further than the grave!)." . . .

I pray that as God walks us through various trials in our lives that we will remember what we've learned from this book—that God is absolutely sovereign over suffering, that **He ordains suffering for our good**, that **suffering exposes our sin** and should bring us to a point of humble repentance for that sin, and finally the hope that our suffering will not last forever. In God's good plans He is **refining us** and sanctifying us in order to prepare us for glory. I'll close with these brief words from **Robert Alden**, "It would be great if we could be in Job's position at the end of the book without going through what he did throughout the book—gain his knowledge without suffering. But it

is doubtful that it can happen. **It takes fire to refine gold (Job 23:10).**”

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/520101040362.pdf>

Phil Schlamp: In my interpretation of the book, the heart of it is found in **40:8-14**. The Lord challenges Job to **humble proud people**. The Lord then uses two huge animals, behemoth (**40:15-24**), and leviathan (**41:1-34**) to give Job an understandable picture of how much energy it takes to humble proud and wicked people. The Lord compares pride to these two huge creatures. Basically, I reduce these sections to this: Job, if you can catch behemoth when he is watching, or if you can catch leviathan with a fishing hook, then you stand a good chance at humbling proud people. And it is here that Job finally comes to the point God has been seeking all along to bring him (**42:1-6**).

And now, God will mop up the mess, bless Job, and Job will live happily ever after. . .

Let me raise one more question from these verses and seek to answer it (**verse 8**). In this verse, the Lord says that Job’s three friends have not spoken *what is right* about God, and Job has. What is it that the Lord is referring to? Well, there are various opinions. I believe it is this. Job’s friends have said, “If you live right you will prosper and if you live wrong, God will afflict you. If you are suffering, it is evidence that you have lived wrong.” Job, on the other hand said that you cannot prove a man’s righteousness by whether he is suffering or not because the wicked prosper as well. I think that is what the Lord is referring to here. . .

You see, Job was a godly man who had bad circumstances allowed into his life, but he ended up living happily ever after. John the Baptist was a godly man who had bad circumstances allowed into his life, and he died. Maybe I should say it gently like this, for those of you who are familiar with the prayer of Jabez: The prayer of Jabez is not for all. If the Lord has chosen that you or I will die of cancer, and he doesn’t enlarge our borders, **blessed is the man who is not offended in Him**. . .

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David Whitcomb: The one main lesson Job needed to learn, and that we needed to learn along with him, is that we can, should, must trust God especially when all the questions of life are not answered. Trusting God, leaning wholly on what He has already revealed about Himself and His work, is evidence that we have yielded control to Him. To trust God and live like we trust God is the place where we find peace in a very messed-up, chaotic world. It is where we find peace in a very uncertain life. We are not required to define all the details and divine nuances of “good.”

We are required to know that all the crazy, mixed-up circumstances of what we call life are working together to create “good” in us. Those very uncertain things are making us to be like Christ. . .

It is true that in life there are many examples of God rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked [**Doctrine of Retribution**]. But we cannot put God in a box of predictability. His grace is too large, too deep for that. In the end, God will be true to

His promises. Therefore, we are wise to heed our Savior's warning, "*Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done*" (**Revelation 22:12**).

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Charles Swindoll: Life can bring unexpected thunderbolts of trouble – cf. quote from **George MacDonald:**

Sometimes a thunderbolt will shoot from a clear sky; and sometimes in the life of a peaceful family, without warning of gathered storm, something terrible will fall. And from that moment everything seems changed. That family is no more exactly what it was before. Better it ought to be, damaged it may be.

The result depends on the family itself and its response to the invading storm of trouble. Forever after, its spiritual weather is altered. But for the family who believes in God, such rending and frightful catastrophes never come but where they are turned around for good in that family's life and in other lives they touch.

Practical Applications:

- Maintain integrity no matter what happens;
- Accept the challenge to change;
- Keep a clear vertical perspective;
- Think theologically;
- Refuse to question the sovereign purpose of God;
- Submit to His will, regardless;
- Don't expect to understand His mysterious ways;
- Count on the justice of the Lord to roll down in His time;
- Humble yourself under His mighty hand;
- Be assured that He misses nothing;
- Rest contentedly in His plan;
- Remember that some day yet future He will abundantly reward.

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