

# **THE BOOK OF JOB** **A BRIEF STUDY**

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This study is subject to editing, changes and alterations as more is learned. It has not been thoroughly reviewed to correct typos, grammatical errors and so on. Any corrections are welcome. Biblical references are from the NASB unless otherwise noted. This was originally done as a series of weekly lessons or lectures. It is called a “brief” study. It is mostly an introduction to the focus of the book, and not intended to be an exhaustive work. Much remains to be examined. Its goal is to move the reader to the understanding of the need to develop “wisdom”. Not man’s wisdom as the book clearly reveals, but the basis and foundation of true wisdom. This true wisdom is stated many times throughout the scriptures, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”.

# **THE BOOK OF JOB**

## **A BRIEF STUDY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

We are going to study the incredible Book of Job and work to grasp its true significance and meaning. Most of us are familiar with the story and generally remember the beginning and the end. Job, a wealthy and righteous man lost everything he had including possessions, family, and his health and was destined to sit on an ash heap rubbing his itching sores with a potsherd. We were told that God Himself permitted Satan to inflict all this on Job. At the end of the book we remember that God rewarded Job for what we assume to be his patience and faith with double the blessings he had before the tragedy. This is the beginning and the end of the book, a total of not even three chapters out of 42. What transpires in the other 39 chapters we have little familiarity, and this is because they seem tedious to read and not worth the effort.

So we draw conclusions of what we are familiar with. However, the intent and point of the book is actually in the 39 chapters and the other three with which we have the most familiarity really have little to do with the intent of God for the reader. So, did God waste His time and ours with the inclusion of 39 extraneous and unnecessarily redundant chapters? We are going to find out.

Because suffering is not isolated to a single man several thousands of years ago, but common to most of mankind, including those of us here today, the book has relevance, but only if we grasp the real message therein. Just yesterday I spoke to a young man in St. Louis, Missouri who was in a terrible state of depression. He had lost his job. He was alienated from his extended family and they have pretty much written him off, not because he is so bad but because he is a Christian and they are involved with the drugs, alcoholism, sexual misconduct, crime and debauchery he refuses to engage in. To make matters worse, the business he had begun didn't make it and he had to fold it up leaving him with tens of thousands of dollars in debt. He still has an apartment he shares with his wife who is supporting them both at the moment and she is supportive, but he is a basket case and is dealing with some physical difficulties as well. His situation is like Job's in many respects. Many of you, including me have had times like Job to one degree or another. We need to understand what it is all about and where God is in all of it. We don't need insipid platitudes, the clicking of the tongues, or pity. We need truth and hope.

The book of Job is not a book for the casual reader. Because of its rather morose ambiance, it is also one of the books least read. Yet the story of Job is well known but people just don't seek to read about pain and suffering. This is understandable, of course, but the book has a vital message that most do not understand or desire to work at understanding. The book is very Jewish, very Hebrew, very "Israelitish" as it were, and goes beyond our western cultural and literary training to a point of bewilderment. We try to make the book fit our point of view or our understanding of things so we can make some sense of it and be satisfied that we have made the effort to understand God's word.

But seldom has there been a more misunderstood book than that of Job. Those who read it often come to it with preconceived ideas about what God intended us to learn from the book, especially when all they really know are the beginning and end of the book. False and misleading conclusions are commonly drawn. For example, some see Job as an object lesson in "patience". We have heard of the "patience of Job", but this idea is not found anywhere in the book. James mentions the endurance of the prophets and Job under severe trial, but that is all there is in scripture. But his comment is not directed to the intent of the story itself. Patience and endurance are not the point of the book.

A second misconception is that it is a book on the suffering of the innocent or righteous. Though Job is innocent and is suffering, the flawed premise is that suffering should not occur to the righteous, but only to the wicked. The premise is false because it assumes that God is the One who deals out these judgments on mankind to warn him or keep him in line. Thus, in Job's case, the justice of God is brought into question and arguments ensue as to the nature of God. These are why the questions are asked in the midst of difficulty such as, "Why this Oh God?", "Why me Oh God", Or, "Where are you Oh God?" Job asks these same questions and we find out later that these are the question of a flawed understanding of God, life and the circumstances of the world, and are based in ignorance and beliefs that do not reflect the truth at all. Most of us have probably asked the same questions ourselves.

Now Job is described as righteous, and he puts most of us to shame in his devotion to God and his family. So we think of the tragedy as even more cruel as if he ought to be exempt from such a thing. We think that if we live as righteously as possible, God should protect us from such pain. So Job causes us a little discomfort. Let's not read Job and maybe it will never happen to me! Well, first, Job is just like all of us is mortal, and has the same misconstrued theology we all have had to deal with and like us has recognized his sins and flaws, but refuses to believe that his suffering is based on his innocence or guilt. In other words, he denies that God works this way. He has glimmers of truth and wisdom here, and perhaps that is the key rather than the perplexing problem of how could God allow such a thing. Still, we hear today all about how sinful some city

must have been for God to inflict such devastation on it through some earthquake or storm.

The character of Job and his suffering is only the stage upon which the truth the book is about is set. The book is not about why the innocent or righteous suffer. I'm sure you have heard that view also. I have a book by a noted Christian scholar who I personally knew years ago when in graduate school that purports this theme as the theme of the book. It is not, and misses the Lord's purpose entirely. You might think, "Who are you Bob Stewart to make such a judgment on a scholar when you are nobody. It sounds pretty arrogant to me." I'll answer that in a moment.

Other ideas offered include that the book is about justifying the will and acts of God to men; or how we can understand God in the midst of evil and suffering (good luck trying to get that out of this book even though many have tried); or how God is sovereign over evil, (this is an even worse theme) or has predetermined everything from the beginning; or that the book is about predestination; or about rewards for one who has persevered under trial; or about divine justice; or whatever. However, none of this is close. Arrogance on my part? We'll see.

Further, this book is not about what men think of God although there is much discourse about this in the book, much of it is wrong, even though I have heard the false counsel of Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and even Elihu quoted often when someone is addressing a tragedy another has suffered. We will look at these fools (God's words - who thought themselves wise) later on.

But in the light of these three (actually four) friends of Job, have you ever heard those counseling people in grief or tragedy - when people are crying out wondering why God did this to them - use the phrases, "everything has a purpose", or "there is a reason for everything", or "God did this for a Reason" or "has a purpose in all this", or "God is in charge of, in control of, everything"? Do they ever sound inadequate and perhaps even cruel to you - I mean imagine the poor desperate soul who barely has faith in God and someone tells them that God did this for a higher purpose? I know a young woman who had to deal with this kind of counsel in a tragic situation and now she hates God, and will not talk about any of it. The counsel comes from, of course, well meaning people trying to comfort her and bring her closer to God. They fail miserably.

But these are the same sentiments we apply to Job and these kinds of phrases are directly derived from the counsel of these four fools and God Himself is the One calling them fools. Yet, I hear them repeated almost every week by well meaning people. Others say one thing and think to themselves, "There must be something wrong with the spiritual life

of this person or his or her fellowship with God to cause them to be afflicted by such disaster.” Almost a direct quote from these friends of Job. These beliefs are so cemented in so many Christians it is difficult to jackhammer them out.

Well, if none of these are the theme and purpose of the book and not what God wants us to learn, then what is it?

Is the book just an extraneous piece of wisdom literature somehow stuffed into the Bible by the well intentioned but moronic scholars who established the canon? And if it is indeed one of the five books of wisdom<sup>1</sup> then what wisdom are we to glean from it?

There is no question that the book is a masterpiece of literature. Lyrics, poetry, the only example of poetic soliloquies in the Bible, and about every literary form possible including parallelisms, metaphors, personifications, similes and on and on. We will see some of this as we proceed, but that isn't why the book is there, to illustrate God's genius in using imagery.

Now, one more point. My so called arrogance. The reason I can dismiss all those views about this book and its teachings is because, 1. None of them are presented in the book as the truth, and 2. The point of the entire book is clearly stated in the book itself, as we will all see for ourselves, and it is none of those things I have dismissed. Let me also say that in consulting with commentaries, I have read commentators who state that one or more themes I have dismissed is indeed the point of the book. Why would these learned scholars make these assertions if they were wrong? Possibly they come to the book with preconceived notions, do not really read the book and work hard at it because they think they know what it is all about from the start and seek to support their own view.

Other commentators, however, possess the same view as I, that is, they are interested in the wisdom God desires to convey. James makes a point about the importance of gaining wisdom in his third chapter. So I am not unique. I firmly believe you as well will be persuaded to understand the book as it states itself to be understood.

Now, here is not how we are going to study the book of Job. We are not going to look at the age of the writing, the authorship, the setting, the geography, the history and all the unending debates about these matters filling pages of scholarly toms for thousands of years. But we are not going to rush through it either.

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<sup>1</sup> Along with: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

Instead, we are going to try to get to the heart of the matter. We will briefly look at some details about the style and literature as they definitely add meaning to understanding the text. But the most important question to ask of the book and of any book or passage in the Bible is, “What is God’s intent for us and what truths are we to glean from this book that will help us stand firm in our faith?” Sadly, some find ways to try and fracture our faith by using (or misusing) the story of Job. After all, how could a good God give permission to Satan to inflict all these unimaginable sufferings upon a decent and righteous man like Job? Not only is the question wrong, but misses the nature and purpose of the book altogether as well as God’s. Nevertheless, this is what people wonder, isn’t it? That issue is not the issue in this book even though the book begins with this scenario. That is why many are convinced that this is a book of wisdom literature and not necessarily a book of both literal and spiritual history and fact. You can debate that all you want, but the matter is germane to those who would seriously study God’s word.

Finally, the majority of the discussion of Job and his four companions is not there to illustrate what God’s wisdom is about all the issues they raise, but to illustrate the inadequate, foolish, distorted, and erroneous assumptions man’s “great” accumulation of “wisdom” actually consists of as he pontificates in the persona of the protagonists about issues he thinks he knows all about but is in actuality completely ignorant regardless of the sprinkling of gems of truth scattered throughout and in spite of the eloquence with which this “wisdom” is expressed.

## **OVERVIEW**

Now, let’s begin. First we will take a quick overview of the structure of the book. This is important. Please make sure you have the book open to chapter one.

The scene is set in the first two chapters. Look at the type style there. You will see that with the exception of 1:21, the entire two chapters are in prose. This is distinguished from the poetic sections by the type style in our English Bibles. Notice the changed type style in chapters 3-42:6, denoting poetry. Notice 42:6 and 7. In 42:6 Job is speaking in the first person as he does throughout the book. But in 42:7, he is referred to in the third person, and the conclusion of the story is told by a narrator. 42:7 is clear that someone is telling the story about Job, and that it is being told to hearers or readers for a reason. Go back to 1:1. Again, the story teller is introducing the drama and does so until 3:1 when the voice becomes that of Job and later that of his friends. God does not speak in the book at all except at the beginning and the end. He does not get involved with the narrative or the drama unfolding therein. This reveals a deliberate structure and direction, not just a random or arbitrary account of someone in pain. In other words, the instruction is the

heart of the matter and the story is the means of conveying the instruction, much like Jesus' parables. However, this is not in the style of a parable, but more in the style of an intense drama, and we can even imagine it as a stage play. The thing that makes this book so much like a stage play is that there are a series of speeches by Job and his friends each completed without interruption in the fashion of a Greek play or even Shakespeare. This is just a suggested framework for you to work within, so the story can become more alive and make more sense.

One more thing about the drama that unfolds before we get directly into the book. In chapter 1:1-5, we are introduced to Job by the story teller. We are given a specific view of his character which we will discuss in a moment. From 1:6-12 we have a dialogue between God and Satan which sets the stage for what is to transpire. It is important to know that no one in the subsequent narrative knows about this dialogue or the arrangement made between God and Satan. Here is how this becomes a drama. Imagine a stage play for a moment. The style of this composition actually lends itself to this format. The curtain opens and we are introduced to Job on center stage. The spotlight is on him. Let's imagine him in a position of prayer. We can see his lips moving silently in prayer. He would be on his knees with his head to the floor or laying prostrate on the floor. The narrator quietly tells us about Job.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER ONE

1:1-5,

1: "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. 2: Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3: His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east. 4: 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. 5: When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all; for Job said, 'Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually."

We are made aware of the extraordinary and exemplary devotion of Job to God and to his family. He is described as “blameless”, “upright”, “fearing God”, and "turning away from evil." It puts most, if not all of us to shame. This does not mean he was sinless, because he recognizes his own sin later in the book, and the scripture is clear that all have sinned. Still, our righteousness pales in comparison. This description of Job is done deliberately for that exact reason. Compared to Job, we all fall short and his subsequent suffering is all the more difficult to grasp. If a righteous man like Job suffers so, what chance have we? And further, it would seem far more just that we should be the ones to suffer instead of Job because we fall so far short. Why is God seen as the one who inflicts such pain on a righteous man like Job? The narrative pushes us to that question and many more and we begin to come up with our own answers and immediately we go astray.

Yet, these are the thoughts we might have and understandably so. Most would have these thoughts and far more...and many questions would arise in every heart. This is the very intent of the setting. All of it is designed to set up these very thoughts and questions! Here's is a secret. Though all of this, especially in the face of what follows, is intended to raise these thoughts and questions in our hearts, and even cause us more consternation. As the setting unfolds in a moment, the book dismisses them all as being completely the wrong thoughts and questions in spite of the drama before us that simply won't let them go. Natural thoughts and questions yes! Understandable thoughts and questions, yes! Thoughts and questions that have plagued us and mankind from the beginning of creation, yes! Thoughts and questions that have stimulated hundreds if not thousands of volumes of

philosophical and theological toms over thousands of years by the greatest minds of history yes! But wrong none the less.

But far more importantly is that what we are told about Job is an important setting for the book. Why? Because it immediately dismisses the arguments by his friends (who represent all the thoughts, questions we have, and the volumes of writings by scholars over the centuries) as to why Job and all mankind has experienced so much suffering. It also dismisses the idea that the book is about God's justice, that God recompenses people based on their righteousness or lack thereof, no matter how we persist in making it so. Yet the point, intent and message of God in the book is extraordinarily simple! It is suffering, common to mankind and raised to an unimaginable level in the story of Job, that makes the point so easy to grasp.

But, back to the stage. Now, the spotlight dims - or the curtains close - and off at stage right, or perhaps in front of the curtains out of the sight of Job, the spotlight now illuminates God, and a number of strange beings. From among them one steps up to God and begins a dialogue. We are told this one is Satan.<sup>2</sup> He approaches God and only we are privy to their discussion. Job cannot hear them and is unaware of all that transpires between them. He and all on stage remain ignorant of this entire encounter. After all, it does happen in heaven, and we are privy to it.

1:6-12

6: Now there was a day when the sons of God<sup>3</sup> came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7: The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it." 8: 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." 9: Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10: "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11: "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." 12: Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

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<sup>2</sup>

Satan" means "adversary" - both of God and mankind.

<sup>3</sup> A title for created beings. See: Genesis 6:2,4; Psalm 29:1; Job 38:7; Luke 20:36

To Satan God says, "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."

This is the second time Job's exemplary character is stated. This is done to underscore and emphasize that there is to be no mistake about Job's character. First the phrase is placed in the mouth of the narrator in the very first verse of the book and now it is placed in the mouth of God. Can we believe that this is the truth about Job? If so, we now have one sure piece of the puzzle. If this is true, then any attempt to understand Job's suffering or the point of the book as reflective of the God's justice in dealing with man has to be dismissed.

We will see in awhile however, that this is exactly what Eliphaz tries to persuade Job to think. So we will sit with Job and listen to Eliphaz later on and see his argument that is often presented that a disaster is nothing more than the result of God punishing or disciplining the unrighteous. In Job, this argument will come to naught. Besides, it has nothing to do with the challenge Satan places before God. Satan's challenge is in the form of a rhetorical question in verse 9. Does anyone have the insight to change the question into a statement? Here it is and the crux of the book. (Job only fears You because you have done all these things for him. Take these things away and Job will curse you.")

To contemporize this, have you ever heard the phrase, "He is a fair weather friend?" Does it sound like Satan is trying to tell God that Job is only a fair weather believer? If we make this personal, we can ask ourselves, "Are we just 'fair weather' believers?" Do we sort of say or think once in a while, "Yeah, Jesus, thanks for dying on the cross for my sins, but what have you done for me lately?" Are there are to many "fair weather" husbands, wives, parents, these days? Do you think there are fair weather believers sprinkled in the church? In other words, do we serve God for our own ends only?

So, isn't Satan is saying that Job's devotion to God is predicated on him being blessed, receiving good things, health, wealth, and so on. Isn't he implying then that God has manipulated Job into serving Him. Does not this suggest that God, in Himself, is not sufficient to engender worship and that Job is so shallow that unless he continues to be blessed by God that he will reject Him at the first opportunity he believes God has let them down. Is this a fair summary? Is Satan right?

Now, to illustrate the total ignorance of statements like this trying to define the relationship of God and Job as well as believers who have a real faith in God transcending the self centered shallowness Satan accuses them of, we are told God gives Job into Satan's hand to do as he wishes with him, except in terms of affecting his physical life or health (verse 12).

1:13-22,

13: "Now on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 14: 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.' 16: 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.' 17: 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.' 18: 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.' 20: Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21: 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.' 22: Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."

So, the spotlight fades on the heavenly scene. The curtains re-open and we see a house filled with young people feasting and enjoying themselves. We know it is the children of Job and they are celebrating the birthday of the eldest son in his house. We see the love shared between them and their joy at just being together. As we listen in and enjoy the time with them, the sound fades, the light dims and goes dark and the scene is changed.

As the light comes up again we now see Job outside of his house on the same day sitting with some servants preparing to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children as he regularly did when they had finished their feasting and drinking (1:5). A moment later a man rushes on stage and approaches Job. He is greatly agitated and says to Job, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 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."

The 500 oxen and the 500 female donkeys, the working animals of the ranch are stolen, and their handlers have been murdered. Job had no time to even contemplate this when another man rushes up to him and announces, "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."

The fire of God, Job knows, is lightning, and it set such a blaze in the fields that neither the 7000 sheep, nor the shepherds assigned to care for them escaped.

But before Job can even respond, and while the man is still speaking, another messenger rushes up to Job and tells him, "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."

Three thousand camels, the ships of the desert, essential to getting goods to market were destroyed along with their handlers. Job is shocked and dismayed at these reports. He has no time to even grasp the enormity of the tragedy. Of course, all of the animals can be replaced, and sadly even new servants hired, but as Job tries to deal with all this another servant comes to him with the saddest news of all and tells Job, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 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." Job is dumbstruck. Darkness falls onto the stage for a moment.

Before the illumination returns to the stage and we see and hear Job's response, let's think honestly about what ours might be - first, if we suffered the same tragedies Job has just suffered and, second if someone we know just suffered the same tragedies as Job.

First, if we were to suffer such a day as Job, I'm sure our individual responses would be different than another person's in some ways but perhaps similar in other ways. The content of those responses I will let you think on. But are there those of us who would immediately look to God and cry out to Him? What would that cry be?

And if we saw this happen to someone else, what would we think? What if the person was a close friend we respected and loved?

Finally, what is the basis or foundation for the thoughts we would think or cries we would voice? Are they valid? Well one thing that is valid are the cries and tears of the afflicted. There are times when we just have to admit we are caught in a bog of human weakness and desperate need of help and understanding.

These are important questions. The thoughts and cries of people in such a crisis are reflected in the rest of the book. The validity of those thoughts as to why these things happen and the nature of God are examined and evaluated as to their truth in the rest of the book because they are the thoughts and cries of nearly every human being that has ever lived, but few would respond as Job did.

We look again to the stage and the light comes up on Job as he tries to grapple with what he has just heard. Here is what he did.

“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, 21: "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." 22: Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”

Job heard the three messengers as he sat in silence; but at the news of the death of his children, brought by the fourth messenger, he can no longer overcome his grief. The intensity of his feeling is indicated by his rising up, saying nothing, tearing his robe just as his heart was torn in grief at losing those dearest to himself. In addition to tearing his clothes, he goes and shaves his head in the fashion of one in deep grief and sorrow in those days. Then he falls to the ground with his head to the earth and breaks his silence.

Verse 21 needs to be understood. Job is simply expressing his powerlessness as a simple human being over the great forces of the universe and of God. That which comes and that which disappears is under the purview of the Creator. He is not expressing an accusation that God caused the disaster, he does not blame God Himself as verse 22 clarifies. Now, we will reveal that it is not God’s response to our quandary that is the issue, but our responses in the midst of suffering that matter, and why.

But you might say, “Hey Bob, God gave Job over to Satan. Isn’t He then at least indirectly responsible for what happened to Job?”

At first glance one could draw this conclusion. But, if the setting is deliberately composed for a totally other purpose to set a scene wherein a tragic drama plays out and if this is not the conclusion to be drawn at all, then what is this really all about? That is a great question! And in seeking the answer, we will hopefully pass through the shallowness of our understanding into a depth of truth that will enlighten us to a new understanding of the greatness of our God.

In addition, though we have a clear picture of Job’s character, there is no mention of the nature or character of either God or Satan. The text doesn’t take the time to add adjectives of description to either. We can surmise the nature of each to some degree if we wish, but that would be irrelevant to the text and the point of the exchange portrayed between God and Satan as it plays out in the ensuing story. Best to leave that alone for a moment no matter how tempting it is. Anyway, any thoughts about God having His

culpability in this matter are negated later in the book.

But reviewing one important key to the point of the book and its intent to impart wisdom we must look at chapter 1: verses 9-11 again.

9: "Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10: "Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11: "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face."

After the lecture on this passage, one class member came to me and told me what she had summarized about this challenge. In summary, she said, "Isn't Satan trying accuse Job of a relationship with God that is based on the condition of God's blessings to Job?" Her main point was right on track. Satan's accusation is indeed, "Job's devotion to God is conditional, and based only on God's goodness to him." That Job only serves God to his own ends is another way of phrasing the accusation. Andm, perhapsm he deserves a reward for doing so.

This presses us under the microscope of Biblical truth as to why we serve God, as well as how we are to understand suffering, in light of our belief in God. The fact that we, as the readers, are forced to follow along with this challenge, puts us at the center of the apparent dilemma. The challenge of Satan to God must now be a challenge to the reader as well. After all, this is a book to be read and get into the "blood stream" of the reader isn't it? Or is it just for theological analysis and debate? Is that why it is written?

Now, we may be prone to think that our devotion to God is without condition. But is it? So the challenge is very real, especially to us who have not suffered to the extent Job has. The real truth is revealed when we are caught in the middle of a personal tragedy. Thus, the story of Job's unimaginable loss and pain is before us. The account is enough to push us to consider Satan's challenge as it would relate to ourselves.

The book could have simply been a verse or two in Proverbs asking, "Do you fear God for nothing? "Is it just for His blessings that you trust Him?" "If they are all taken away would you still trust God and believe in Him without question or doubt?" – Questions to which most of us would murmur, "yes" - and move on to the next proverb. But we are not given this easy way out. We are forced into the discomfort of serious thought over this plague of sorrow. We are stirred by the story of the unimaginable suffering in the life of a man whose righteousness we can't even begin to match. We have a lot of questions about it and want to understand the important things in our life and our faith should we come to a place of loss, pain, and grief. We seek the wisdom of the Lord.

So we leave Job at the end of chapter one, in great despair and mourning. It wasn't the loss of his material goods, livestock and fields that caused Job the blow that brought him to the ground, but the loss of all his children. I have never lost a child. There are those who have. It is devastating. Material things can be replaced. No question Job was hit hard by the loss of all his wealth, but he was crushed when the report came that his children were gone.

Most of us are not so calloused that we place our material goods above our family. There are some. Just this week I counseled with a man, not here in the church and not even a Christian. He sought me out to give him advice about his marriage, which after nineteen Years, was on the verge of divorce. "Why do you want to preserve the marriage?" I asked. In brief his answer was, "I have accumulated goods and properties over the years and have financial success. I don't want to lose it." In other words, he didn't give a whit about his wife and two teenagers, just was worried about losing his stuff in a divorce settlement. Jesus' question "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" came to mind.

Though Job is described as an exemplary and devoted man both to God and to his family, we find him quite human in his collapse and disintegration at the news. If word came to me that one or more of my children were killed, I know that I would fall apart. Even now, just thinking about it causes me an emotional response I must repress. Most parents can sense a little what Job went through even apart from experiencing such a loss.

Now, as we again look upon the scene on our imaginary stage, we see Job speechless, dumbstruck, in shock, at the news of the loss of all that he has, but especially his children. In ancient rituals he found a means to function and express his deep mourning. Silently he rises up, tears his robe, and goes to shave his head before finally falling to his face in worship. He never says a thing against God or screams out, "Why?" or cries out, "Oh God" or pleads with God to make it untrue as probably most of us would do. His response is difficult for us to embrace.

He said, 21: "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."

I have noted that verse 21 needs to be understood as we tend to think of and use this phrase as something God has deliberately done to bring us pain and suffering. Sometimes we hear the phrase at funerals to state that in some way and for some unknown reason we don't understand, God brought about this tragedy. That is definitely NOT what Job is implying. He is simply expressing his powerlessness as a simple human being over the great forces of the universe and of God. That which comes and that which disappears is under the

purview of the Creator. He is not expressing an accusation that God caused the disaster, nor does he blame God Himself as verse 22 clarifies, “Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.” What we see in Job’s statement, and what will be elaborated on in the book is the complete and total sovereignty of God to which he becomes submissive. I say “becomes” because in spite of his character, he later succumbs to asking God to tell him the “whys” of his pain.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER TWO

But let's continue. Job 2:1-7. As the stage goes dark and the spotlight illuminates stage right outside of the curtains, we are again privy to a discussion in heaven.

1: Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2: 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." 3: 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." 4: Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5: "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." 6: So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." 7: 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.

Prior to this, the physical body of Job had not been afflicted and though he has suffered immeasurable loss, he still held fast to his trust in God. The English translation of the Hebrew uses the word "integrity", and this is a good translation if we understand it in the sense used by the construction industry. A structure defined as having "integrity" means its integral components are fully intact. For example, after an earthquake, a building still has "integrity" if it has not been damaged or weakened by the quake and is in as good a condition after the quake as it was before the quake. Understanding this, Job has not crumbled or been damaged in his trust of God in spite of his tragic losses.

God asserts this about Job and says something interesting to Satan, "***And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.***" What is this? God was "incited" to do this by Satan? The word means, "to be turned aside from an intended course." This appears to be exactly what happened. But remember, God baited Satan into considering Job in the first place. So what are we to think? The answer to this question is more involved than the surface story appears or we have time to study. Suffice it to say, that in the literary presentation of this wisdom book, and for our purposes, there is a "challenge" God is setting before Satan, but giving Satan the false idea that his argument has some legitimacy. However you look at it, this "challenge" is intended to set the stage for a serious look at the issues involved. The interchange between God and

Satan is not actually germane to the point of the book. It simply establishes the setting for our gaining of true wisdom. We probably give way to much time and energy to this because it is so boggling to us. But in reality, we need not, and actually must not, get so embroiled and bogged down in the first three chapters that we lose the point of the whole thing in the first place.

Now, in our story, God's commendation of Job infuriates Satan and he tells God that the reason Job has not wavered is that he has not suffered personal physical pain. 4: Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5: "However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." 6: So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

The term "skin for skin" is similar to our expression "To save one's skin" in that a person will do most anything or endure most anything to simply stay alive. There is another expression we have heard, "If you have your health you have everything". Have you ever heard something like that? So it appears that added to the wrenching emotional pain and grief Job is already suffering will be excruciating physical pain, and Job will lose his health. The light fades on the heavenly scene and we await the opening of the curtain, uneasy as to what we might see.

Consider this as we await the opening of the curtain. The setting of the scene is almost complete now, and rather than beginning to remove ourselves from the horror before us, we are drawn in further and forced to confront it and ourselves and our thoughts, and our philosophy and our theology and our emotions and our responses. They all now come under the microscope of God's truth. Believe it or not, we are actually honored and privileged to have this happen, for the exam is given so that the ensuing truth therapy will produce maturity and wisdom, stability and confidence in our hearts and force us to discard all the trash that has been spouted over the centuries about God and the problem of human suffering. Are we ready for the exam? For me this thought brought to mind Hebrews 4:12-13 which may make us uneasy as it says, 12: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13: And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." We may have some apprehension at such a thing, but the context clearly sees this as a good thing. It is spoken in the context of a promise of rest God does not want us to miss because His Son gave so much that we could inherit it. There is something like this in Job as well as our hearts are carefully and honestly examined, and as much as we may not want to see what is there, it is good for us.

Now, the curtain opens and we see poor Job out in a field sitting in the middle of the trash dump where all the waste and trash is burned. He has chosen to sit on a pile of ashes and he has thrown ashes on himself as a sign of his distress. He has been smitten with painful boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. He has found a broken pottery shard and is scraping his itching, painful boils with it to try and find some relief. His condition is devastating. His flesh is swollen and oozing with boils and he is unrecognizable. His wife is by his side in terrible grief. She is no doubt also crushed by the loss of her children and now her husband is in terrible pain.

She is angry with God and takes it out on Job, perhaps in some way compassionate for his pain because we see in a while that Job himself wishes that he was dead. So in tears and with anger in her heart she yells at him, 9: "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" She knows that Job has done nothing to deserve the pain she believes God has poured out upon him unjustly. Her statement reveals her beliefs. Rather than criticize her, as so many have done including me, we might acknowledge that we understand her feelings. In my later years, I have heard many, many exclamations like that of Job's wife from both believers and non-believers. But, life is what it is. These kinds of things happen to all of us to one extent or another. The point of this book is what our response will be.

Now here is secret number two.<sup>4</sup> In the overall picture, it is really of no concern in the narrative what or who the source of suffering is. Remember, no one on stage knows about the "challenging deal" God has made with Satan. If this "challenging deal" was never written about, the story and its point could still be made except that God speaks to the thoughts and words of all in the narrative to follow and has some profound things to say. But the real issue is whether our faith and trust in God is tied to our circumstances. The assumption is that if God didn't directly cause the pain He could have prevented it. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?<sup>5</sup>

Job's response to his wife is thought provoking. 10: "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?" In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's answer simply contradicts what his wife, what his friends will say, and what many people actually believe. He declares that his faith in God is not tied to his circumstances whether they be good or adverse. In this, Satan's argument and his accusation, repeated by

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<sup>4</sup> See page 8, last paragraph for the first secret.

<sup>5</sup> This question is discussed in my work on the problem of evil found on my website at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org)

Job's wife and later by his friends as they attack hi, is dismissed by Job. We hear no more from Satan.

The curtain is about to close on this scene but before it does, we see three men ride onto the property and dismount before Job. The story is told in verses 11-13.

11: 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. 12: 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. 13: 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.

# THE BOOK OF JOB

## CHAPTER THREE

### Introduction:

We have left Job, in terrible mourning and pain, on his burned trash heap disfigured, covered with painful boils and attempting to find relief by scratching himself with a pottery shard. Three of Job's friends are with him. They had heard of Job's situation and agreed to go to him and comfort him the best that they could. Let's not mistake the motives of these men. They are good men and full of compassion and sorrow for Job's agony. Their names are Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Even as they rode near to Job's place they saw him on the ash heap and were not able to recognize him. Job was swollen and disfigured by the oozing boils all over his body from his head to his feet. When they saw him their response was to cry out and weep for Job. The shock of Job's condition was far more than they had anticipated. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over his head toward the sky. Then, "...they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights, no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that *his* pain was very great."

Seven days in the Bible are noted as a time of deep mourning, usually for the death of someone well respected. Sometimes they were spent in fasting. In this case, the fast also included silence except for the weeping and throwing dust over their heads.

The rest of the drama, save the last five chapters, is a dialogue between Job and his friends at the ash heap and it is in the written form of poetry from chapter 3:1 onward. We are about to hear Job break the silence and speak. His speech is divided into three sections, 3:1-10; 11-19, and 20-26. When seven days were complete, Job broke the fast and said what was on his heart. His first words were to curse the day of his birth. His intent is that subsequent days that fall thereon were not to be remembered or honored. God Himself should not have any interest in that day reoccurring in history. It should be eliminated, destroyed, banished, forgotten, rendered non-existent. It is an accursed day. Gazing once again upon the stage of this drama, we await Job's words.

3:1-5

1: Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his *birth*. 2: And Job said, 3: "Let the day perish on which I was to be born, And the night *which* said, 'A boy is conceived.' 4: "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.

The night of his conception is to be treated likewise.

6: "*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. 7: "Behold, let that night be barren; Let no joyful shout enter it. 8: "Let those curse it who curse the day, Who are prepared to rouse Leviathan. 9: "Let the stars of its twilight be darkened; Let it wait for light but have none, And let it not see the breaking dawn; 10: Because it did not shut the opening of my *mother's* womb, Or hide trouble from my eyes.

In essence, Job wishes he had never been born, and that the night of his conception and the day of his birth had never occurred. The day is cursed to him. He even wishes that sorcerers who mutter incantations and curses, curse the day he was born with the power they claim to raise the monster of the sea, Leviathan, from the depths of the sea to wreck havoc on some ship. Hopefully, we can begin to identify or even empathize with Job. There may have been, for some of us, unimaginable pain at some point in our lives. Job's statements may be similar to our own.

However, in all this, Job never curses God. There may be those among us who have come to the point of such despair that death seemed the best way out. In any case, we may be able to identify with Job if we have ever felt this way ourselves.

11-19:

In the next section of Job's soliloquy (later he tells us he is speaking to the wind),<sup>6</sup> he takes the next step recognizing that he indeed was born and came into this world, but wishes that he would have been still-born. Death is preferable to his pain and torment. Now comes a poem about the peace of death. It reveals the first of Job's "whys".

11: "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? 13: "For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, 14: With kings and *with* counselors of the earth, Who rebuilt ruins for themselves; 15: Or with princes who had gold, Who were filling their houses *with* silver. 16: "Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be (I would now not exist), as infants that never saw light. 17: "There the wicked cease from raging, And there the weary are at

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<sup>6</sup> See: 6:26

rest. 18: "The prisoners are at ease together; They do not hear the voice of the taskmaster. 19: "The small and the great are there, And the slave is free from his master.

In other words, all the painful experiences of life would be resolved with death. He berates the fact that he lived at birth and asks why he survived birth to come to this end. He would have rather been born dead than to have to experience such torment. I have asked as so many, the same "Why?" before God. There is rarely a comforting answer.

In the final section, verses 20-26, Job again asks pleadingly, "Why?"

20: "Why is light given to him who suffers, And life to the bitter of soul, 21: Who long for death, but there is none, And dig for it more than for hidden treasures, 22: Who rejoice greatly, *And* exult when they find the grave? 23: "*Why is light given* to a man whose way is hidden, And whom God has hedged in? 24: "For my groaning comes at the sight of my food, And my cries pour out like water. 25: "For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me. 26: "I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."

Verses 25 and 26 bring to mind that there are few who would argue that one of the things that plague us the most is, "not knowing", and the apprehension and fear that can bring. Not knowing where our children are or what has happened to them because they are very late getting home. Not knowing if our loved one on the front lines are safe. Not knowing why something terrible has happened when there is no rational explanation for it. Not knowing if a loved one or one's self is going to survive the disease, or the surgery to cure it. Not knowing why, not knowing how it will turn out can be a difficult, plaguing, burden when the situation is at a crisis point.

Here in Job's desperation he cries out, "Why?" When in suffering beyond measure, "Why does life persist?" "Please", Job cries, "Let me die". In verse 24, his despair prevents him from even eating.

Verse 25 should be understandable. It is common to many of us. In times of success and prosperity, we wonder what might come along and ruin it. We call it, "Waiting for the other shoe to drop." We are caught up in this and say, when good things occur, "I can't believe it!" And when the bad things come along and our hopes are dashed we say, "I knew that would happen!"

In thinking about what one's fears coming upon them, Donna and I lived for years in Southern California and were resident there for the massive Northridge earthquake, the

Sylmar earthquake and so on. Like Job, there have been many times where we wondered if what we feared would come upon us. And it did one day as a quake hit and we were partially walking on the walls of a topsy-turvey house moving with the waves of the quake. We live in a dangerous and evil world. Perhaps most of us can identify with Job in some ways. I have heard some preachers twist scripture into saying, "Don't be like Job, for if you fear something it will come upon you." The only thing I fear about this is the possibility of ever hearing them preach again.

You might have heard someone say, "You have to be prepared for what is to come." It is impossible to be prepared for what Job suffered. If anything, he had worked hard to do all he could to "prepare" for the future. But for him, the worst of whatever he had feared and far more had been dumped on him. But in all of his statement he did not directly condemn God or blame God for the events themselves, he just couldn't stand being alive, let alone conscious with the impact of what had hit him so hard. He could neither understand it nor could he bear it.

I believe that one of the reasons Job is seen as speaking first in this book is that his speech probably represents the feelings of most people we caught in such a sudden catastrophe. In like manner, the responses of his three devoted friends are also much like that which most people would employ trying to answer Job's cry to understanding - his cry, "Why"? Thus Job's speech motivates his friends to offer their own wisdom on the matter. It is a common "wisdom", a human "wisdom" a "wisdom" that is far below what we will come to know as God's wisdom. As we read the responses of Job's friends, we may, from time to time, ask the simple question, "What is wrong with that?" or say, "That sounds right to me". Perhaps a reason we might respond that way is that we have been told these answers for so long. Then part of our dilemma is that we find sprinkled in these speeches many nuggets of truth. But the conclusions drawn from these nuggets of truth are the problem, as we will hopefully see in time.

Eliphaz is prompted to respond to Job. During the seven days, he may have been trying to think through the question "Why"? himself. It appears he is the elder man in the group. In the main, they all represent one view, but each with his individual peculiarity as we will see.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER FOUR

4:1-4

1: Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, 2: "If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking? 3: "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.

The first thing Eliphaz asks is whether his speaking will tax Job even further. The English translation of the Hebrew as “impatient” is lacking. The word means to become weary, taxed, grieved or exhausted. Impatient is a little weak. Before Job even answers, Eliphaz rushes on because it doesn’t matter what Job thinks. He is compelled to speak and can’t restrain himself from spouting off his own wisdom and viewpoint. First, Eliphaz gives Job a token recognition of his good character as a set up so he can tear him down. Something like, “Sure, you’re a good and honorable man but no one is perfect.” There is always a “but” when it comes to describing a person’s character. An easy “straw-man” argument. He continues,

4:5-11,

5: "But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; It touches you, and you are dismayed. 6: "Is not your fear of God your confidence, And the integrity of your ways your hope? 7: "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? 8: "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. 10: "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."

5: “It” has come to you. What is “it”? It sounds like Eliphaz is either implying that Job has Received the judgment of God or simply declines to voice the word for fear he himself might come under such a catastrophe. Is he suggesting Job is getting what he deserves? Then in verse 5 there is the word “impatient” again and in this setting I don’t think anyone would call Job’s suffering mere “impatience”. The word “impatient” parallels the word “dismayed”. The word “dismayed” is better understood as an “inner quaking or trembling” – to be “totally shaken”, filled with anxiety and fear. This matches well with the more intense meaning of “impatience”, that is, “weak” and “exhausted”.

Remember, Job hasn't eaten in over a week. He is emotionally and physically spent.

6: May I point out that Eliphaz is not complimenting Job here. We know this from Job's response later. Rather Eliphaz is but pointing out the error of Job's ways, that is - that Job is trusting in his own righteousness as his confidence and hope. Plus, we catch Eliphaz in a false premise of his own in that he suggests that one's trust in one's own righteousness is the reason for confidence and hope. So, based on this false premise, Eliphaz draws the conclusion that then innocent and upright do not experience what Job has experienced. We see this now in verses 7-9,

7: "Remember now, who *ever* perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? 8: "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.

This opinion disintegrates when we think of our Savior and all He suffered. Eliphaz' self-righteousness is displayed here as apparently he has not suffered such loss.

10: "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."

10-11: Eliphaz uses this illustration to insult Job suggesting that regardless of a person's status they are subject to destruction.

Now, he interjects his opinion as the voice of a mysterious spirit so as to remove it from his own philosophy and attribute it as coming from a spiritual force.

12: "Now a word was brought to me stealthily, And my ear received a whisper of it. 13: "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. 15: "Then a spirit passed by my face; The hair of my flesh bristled up. 16: "It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; A form *was* before my eyes; *There was* silence, then I heard a voice: 17: '**Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?**

This rhetorical question expects the answer...“No”! This is what Eliphaz believes!<sup>7</sup> Yet this stands in the face of God's own words which affirm three times that Job “is like

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<sup>7</sup> One has to wonder if Eliphaz himself realizes, by his own words, he is one of the unrighteous.

no one else on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil, and that there is no cause for his ruin due to his character”. To emphasize his point, Eliphaz says,

18: 'He (God) 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! 20: '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.'

Eliphaz is telling Job that he cannot assume righteousness before God or trust in it because he has suffered the catastrophes God only pours out on the unrighteousness. Then, he accuses those so crushed of dying without wisdom...because they don't see it as Eliphaz sees it. Yet it is Eliphaz himself that is in error. Job has never trusted in his righteousness to preserve him. This is illustrated by the fact that he has never accused God of being capricious. Job will make this point later. In addition, Eliphaz is wrong in assuming that the righteous would never suffer as Job has, and he so he is also wrong in assuming that Job must be unrighteous. His conclusion thus far is that he is the wiser of the two. Is he? Next time, we will examine what Eliphaz counsels Job to do about this now that we all know his suffering is due to his terrible unrighteousness.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER FIVE

At the end of the seven days, Job wailed and cried out that the day of his birth be cursed and that he wished he were dead. He wondered why he had to live in the torment he was suffering. But in all of his lamentation he did not directly condemn God or blame God for the events themselves. He just couldn't stand being alive, let alone conscious with the impact of what had hit him so hard. Like any person, Job He could neither understand it nor could he bear it.

The eldest of his friends, Eliphaz, in a sincere effort to help Job began to offer what he thought was sage advice. His advice, taking into consideration all of chapter four, is that God does not punish the righteous and only those either unrighteous or trusting in their righteousness to protect themselves will fall to God's discipline and correction. He implies that Job is one of these. He sets the theme for what he expects his other two friends present there to say as they are to agree with him.

Yet Eliphaz has stated a faulty premise and theological position and thus the conclusions he draws are also faulty. First, Job is not unrighteous and Eliphaz' assertion stands in the face of God's own words which affirm three times that Job "is like no one else on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil", and that "there is no cause for his ruin due to his character". Second, Job is not, has not and does not trust in his own righteousness to preserve as his trust is in the Lord alone, albeit he is confused as to why he is suffering so dearly.

Now, with Job silent and posing no objection, Eliphaz is emboldened to amplify his false premise and flawed assumptions. So he rushes on to advise Job about what Job needs now to do. He does so with the self-confidence of years and the demeanor of a prophet. Now, as the curtain opens on this distressful scene, Eliphaz continues.

5:1-7,

5:1 "Call now, is there anyone who will answer you? And to which of the holy ones will you turn? 2: "For anger slays the foolish man, And jealousy kills the simple. 3: "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, And there is no deliverer. 5: "His harvest the hungry devour And take it to a *place of thorns*, And the schemer is eager for their wealth. 6: "For affliction does not come from the dust, Nor does trouble

sprout from the ground, 7: For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward."  
(Bold text mine)

1-7: Eliphaz is telling Job not to be as the foolish and simple, as these are the ones he curses (nice fellow). They find their sons far from safety, they themselves oppressed, their harvest destroyed and their wealth dissipated. It sounds like what happened to Job, doesn't it? Is Eliphaz suggesting in a back door sort of way that Job has suffered the curse of the foolish? And, look at the arrogance of Eliphaz. All the disasters coming upon the foolish is apparently due to his own power in cursing them. Wow, one better fear Eliphaz.

It sounds like he is turning the screws on Job. According to Eliphaz, there has to be a reason that God brought all this upon Job. So now, Job better listen up to this wise and experienced sage. Emboldened by Job's silence, Eliphaz prattles on.

5:8: "But as for me, (i.e. "If I were you") I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God...."

As I recall, Job was on his knees in prayer every day and offered sacrifices every day just in case his children might have sinned or cursed God in their hearts. And, though Job has spoken of his terrible torment and wish to die, he hasn't actually placed his cause before God? What cause is Eliphaz thinking Job ought to bring to God? We'll come back to this.

Earlier, I also noted that as we read the responses of Job's friends, we may, from time to time, ask the simple question, "What is wrong with that?" or say, "That sounds right to me". Part of our dilemma is that we find sprinkled in these speeches many nuggets of truth. But the conclusions drawn from these nuggets of truth are the problem, as we are beginning to see. Let's see if there are more as we listen to this friend once again as Eliphaz defines the nature of God.

5:9: "... who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number. 10: "He gives rain on the earth And sends water on the fields, 11: So that He sets on high those who are lowly, And those who mourn are lifted to safety."

This sounds right and one might think that Eliphaz is a spiritual man. Of course he does not see Job as one of the lowly. Then he says,

5:12-14: "He (God) frustrates the plotting of the shrewd, So that their hands cannot attain success." (*Huh? Where is he going?*)13: "He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted. 14: "By day they meet with darkness, And grope at noon as in the night."

Now this all sounds good. Except to Job. He implies that Job fits this description. Eliphaz is quite the judge. We will see that Eliphaz is actually a prophet of his own future not of Job's present. Now part of this passage is quoted by the apostle Paul when he applies it to the wisdom of the world versus the gospel.<sup>8</sup> But here, Eliphaz is not thinking of himself - of course not - but perhaps suggesting that Job is the so called wise caught by his own shrewdness which proves him foolish. Job would not like that and it does not fit Job.

15: "But He saves from the sword of their mouth, And the poor from the hand of the mighty.

A little clarification on this verse. Verse 15a sounds like nonsense, and this is the challenge of Hebrew poetry. What this means is simple, "God saves "the poor" from the sword of the wise or shrewd". We know this for two reasons. One, the context. Two, this is a parallelism with the second strophe and we know that a parallelism repeats the theme in different words in its second strophe.

16: "So the helpless has hope, And unrighteousness must shut its mouth.

Okay, here we go! Eliphaz now pontificates on his inflated but erroneous assumption. Job needs to plead his case before God. What case is that? His unrighteousness. Because he has not owned up to his unrighteousness or his dependence upon his righteousness to save him, he is being afflicted by God. Now listen to where this takes Eliphaz.

17: Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. (*Hebrews 12:5*) 18: "For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands *also* heal."

So if Job were truly righteous or trusted in God and not in his own righteousness, here is what he would be saved from: (Notice Eliphaz goes from the second person "he" to the third person "you")

5:19-27,

19: "From six troubles He will deliver you, Even in seven evil will not touch you. 20: "In famine He will redeem you from death, And in war from the power of the sword. 21: "You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, And you will not be afraid of violence when it comes. 22: "You will laugh at violence and famine, And you will not be afraid of wild beasts. 23 "For you will be in league with the stones of the field, And

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<sup>8</sup> I Corinthians 3:19

the beasts of the field will be at peace with you. 24: "You will know that your tent is secure, For you will visit your abode and fear no loss. 25: "You will know also that your descendants will be many, And your offspring as the grass of the earth. 26: "You will come to the grave in full vigor, Like the stacking of grain in its season.

Here is where Eliphaz is unable to continue. "Hey Eliphaz, Job has been, and is righteous by God's own word and has never trusted in his righteousness to preserve himself or his family yet still suffered all the things you preach God will protect the righteous from." Of course Eliphaz knows nothing of God's pronouncement, so like many Christians, he makes assumptions and then glittering judgements and proclamations of his own "wisdom" upon the poor Job. Someone is screwed up somewhere here and its not God or Job!

To conclude, Eliphaz, not wanting to speak by himself includes the others in his assumptions as he slogs on with his arrogance!

27: "Behold this; we have investigated it, *and* so it is. Hear it, and know for yourself."

The other two friends nod knowingly and of course wisely. Experience it for yourself Eliphaz challenges! Maybe Eliphaz and his friends ought to experience Job's suffering and then wonder why it occurred to them, the most wise and righteous on the planet. Job has been far more tolerant than I would have been, I assure you. But after all, it is important that we hear Eliphaz out because that is what God wants us to do. Why? Because honestly, without the serious consideration we are giving this book, many of us might scan past these passages and think Eliphaz was correct and we would have to consider his argument valid and bring into question the actions of God, and the true character of Job like so many millions have done before us. We would be confused about God and His role when terrible suffering occurs. Certainly it must be because the people so afflicted – such as by a devastating hurricane, or a destructive earthquake, or a terrible volcanic eruption, a tsunami or even a massacre or a holocaust must have come under the judgment of God because of their unrighteousness. In fact, until a few minutes ago you might have believed this yourself along with those who are also totally baffled by the book of Job.

So here is what Job answered in verses 2-7 of chapter 6,

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER SIX

6:1: Then Job answered,

2: "Oh that my grief (vexation) were actually weighed  
And laid in the balances together with my calamity!

3: "For then it would be heavier than the sand of the  
seas; Therefore my words have been rash (wild).

4: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me,  
Their poison my spirit drinks;  
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

5: "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.

In this series of poetic parallelisms, let's take this a piece at a time. Although several may wonder about Job's attitude here, I have come down on the side of anger and disappointment. Here is why;

In verse 2, the NASB translates the Hebrew as "grief". The Hebrew is much better translated as "vexation" here because that is its basic meaning. Other terms that could be used are "anger", "indignation", "provocation" or "rage". (Note: RSV, RV, NIV, and Jewish Publication Bible)

So it is very acceptable to see Job's response as that of being quite unhappy with Eliphaz's counsel. Based on this beginning, and on what follows in a moment, there is no question in my mind about the tone of Job's response. In addition, the first phrase is placed in the image of a scale opposite Job's calamities. The ancient weighing device is

one of those that has a bar over a center pin (or hanging from a rope) with chains (or ropes) hanging down on each side attached to plates or baskets. On one side a standard weight is placed and it determines the weight of the item placed on the other plate as they are weighed against each other. We see this image in the hand of Blindfolded Lady Justice outside of our court buildings.

The first strophe is seen by Job in contrast to the second, so they can't be the same. Since the word "calamity" means "deadly destruction" it describes Job's catastrophic suffering and so the word vexation can only refer to the counsel of Eliphaz. Verse three then parallels verse two.

3: "For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; Therefore my words have been rash (wild).

Job is saying that the vexation caused by the speech of Eliphaz (supported by the other two men) has made his suffering even worse if that was possible. His words of pain have merited him more pain. Rather than lift him up and give him some hope and support, or at least some assistance to get Job on his feet and even help in the rebuilding of his life in some way, or even find a salve for his wounds, all they have done is pierce him with more pain.

Now in this framework, the next four verses are easy to get.

4: "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, Their poison my spirit drinks; The terrors of God are arrayed against me.

Job reiterates the pain that he feels both in his body and in his heart. Then he evaluates Eliphaz's speech in this light. You will enjoy this.

5: "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?"

The picture may not be clear to us so let me assist. The donkey and ox do not bray and low over good pasture. In other words, the "food" Eliphaz has offered to the starving Job is not palatable. It is as tasteless and repulsive as the raw white of an egg. Job concludes,

7: "My soul refuses to touch *them*; They are like loathsome food to me." Job just told Eliphaz what he thought of his comfort, and of his friendship.

Wow, not only do we not need a friend like this when we are hurting, but let us determine not to **be** a friend like this either.

Now let me reiterate that we will not review every verse in the Book of Job, but take key passages to highlight the discussions so we can grasp God's point and intent on presenting this book to us.

We already know from the introduction that Eliphaz' counsel is in error, because we are told that Job, "is like no one else on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil", and that "there is no cause for his ruin due to his character". Second, Job is not, has not and does not trust in his own righteousness to preserve himself as his trust is in the Lord alone, albeit he is confused as to why he is suffering so dearly. The one filled with pride and self righteousness is Eliphaz, not Job.

After a week of fasting, food is prepared and all partake except Job who is far too emotional and in too much pain to eat. In fact he would rather not eat and just die as soon as possible. After hearing Eliphaz arrogantly tell Job he is the cause of all this suffering and loss, Job tells Eliphaz that his counsel is loathsome to him as food unfit to eat. Job continues to make it clear how he feels about Eliphaz and his friends in 6:14-21,

14: "For the despairing man *there should be* kindness from his friend; So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty."

(Job knows that God did not attack him and his family because of Job's unrighteousness and to think so could cause a man to turn away from God. How often have we heard this argument and seen people turn from God because they believed false counsel?)

15: "My brothers have acted *deceitfully* like a wadi - (this is a wash or stream bed in the desert that fills up with water when it storms and then dries away) - 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. (How are wadis deceitful?) 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. 21: "Indeed, you have now become such..."

This is the effect Job has felt. He looked forward to the arrival of his friends and then was crushed by them. The Hebrew word for "deceitful" means they have come in friendship covering up their true motives. They have acted treacherously, unfaithfully

in their claim to be Job's friends, and have brought great offense to Job. This is the meaning of Job's words. Then Job says, "You see a terror and are afraid." What are they afraid of? Don't guess. Job tells them.

22: "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'?"

They are afraid Job might ask them to help. They are afraid they might have to endure some cost or burden. They might have to get involved. Then Job challenges them to say that he is wrong about this. Note verses 24-28,

24: "Teach me, and I will be silent; And show me how I have erred. 25: "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. 28: "Now please look at me, And *see* if I lie to your face.

Verse 27 is an insult to the three visitors. Job is telling his friends their counsel is like the having no feelings of compassion for even the orphan and would select an orphan by casting lots so as to place them into forced servitude as a slave. They would do the same even to a friend.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER SEVEN

Now, in chapter seven 1-10, Job, anticipating his approaching death berates the futility of his life and hopes for the relief of nothingness. In 11, he says, "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." For the first time, he lashes out in bitterness at God, verses 16-21.

7:16: "I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are *but* a breath. 17: "What is man that You magnify him, And that You are concerned about him, 18: That You examine him every morning And try him every moment? 19: "Will You never turn Your gaze away from me, Nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle? 20: "Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself? Job 21: "Why then do You not pardon my transgression And take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust; And You will seek me, but I will not be."

Though a righteous man, he is human and his bitter plea is understandable. He doesn't know why God has done this to him. These are the "whys" of many who suffer. So this tells us: 1. Job believes God has done this, 2. That it may be due to some iniquity he can't figure out and, 3. He wonders why, presumably after all his sacrifices and devotion, his iniquities have not been removed. So he seeks to find solace in death. He succumbs to hopelessness and can see no way out except death. He is affected by the counsel of the "friends" but is not in agreement with this counsel leaving him without anything to grasp.

Now we must stop and remind ourselves of the challenge of the first two chapters wherein it seems that God is indeed the cause of Job's suffering and, by extrapolation, human suffering as well. Yet is this so? Strangely enough, though this is discussed in the dialogues as well as assumptions made as to why God inflicts suffering on humankind, it is neither the point of the prologue nor of the book. The heart of the book is the response to suffering that is made and the assumptions and the understanding underlying those responses. As far as where suffering actually comes from and why, we will pursue this later, I promise. Presently, let me postulate that we cannot look at God as the origin of suffering. All the "buts" will be addressed before this study is complete. For now, we must continue to stay on track or lose sight of where God wants us to go and what He wants us to learn.

After hearing Job's bitter lament and prayer to God, Bildad cannot keep quiet any longer. After all, Job asked God in Bildad's presence, 20: "Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself? Job 21: "Why then do You not pardon my transgression And take away my iniquity? Bildad, without the eloquence of Eliphaz that we and Job easily saw through, comes right out and bluntly says what is on his mind. It seems he is a little agitated.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER EIGHT

Job 8:1: Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,

2: "How long will you say these things, And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind? 3: "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right? 4: "If your sons sinned against Him, Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression. 5: "If you would seek God And implore the compassion of the Almighty, 6: If you are pure and upright, Surely now He would rouse Himself for you And restore your righteous estate. 7: "Though your beginning was insignificant, Yet your end will increase greatly. 8: "Please inquire of past generations, And consider the things searched out by their fathers. 9: "For we are *only* of yesterday and know nothing, Because our days on earth are as a shadow. 10: "Will they not teach you *and* tell you, And bring forth words from their minds?

Bildad's understanding of justice is the issue here. Since God is just and not capricious or arbitrary, the terrible disasters befalling Job and his family cannot be anything else than the demonstration of God's perfect justice. There can be no other explanation! But why Job and his family? In order to avoid saying directly that Job's children had died such a sudden death on account of their sin, Bildad speaks conditionally. "If" they have sinned, death is just the punishment of their sin. God has not arbitrarily swept them away, but has justly given them over to the destroying hand of their wickedness (verse 4).

However, we know Bildad is wrong because of the same prologue describing Job as righteous and blameless, and offering sacrifices on behalf of his sons in case they had sinned or cursed God in their hearts. But isn't God just? In the the first two lessons, we dismissed this question as having anything to do with the theme of the book and here, it is again dismissed as far as this narrative is concerned. But just in case you are still wondering about the question, let me answer it with a story I have told a time or two before. Years ago I was talking to a fellow believer named Jim and after he had pontificated about his good works and devotion in keeping the Law and so on I finally asked him, "Jim, when you stand before God do you want to be judged by his justice or by His grace and mercy?" He answered, "By His justice, of course". This seems to be the convoluted thinking of Bildad and his friends also. But the apostle John wrote, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) God's justice was satisfied in what Jesus did on the cross for all men for all time. It

is prefigured over and over again throughout the Bible from Genesis onward. His love grace and mercy overshadows and provides for His justice to be satisfied.

But life is not necessarily "Just." And we, who were given dominion over the creation (Genesis one) handed it over to Satan (Genesis three) and now we live under this "ruler of the world" and the consequences thereof.

Now Bildad, in verses 8-10 basically tells Job, "If you don't accept what we are saying, consider the words of the sages of the past and you will see that we are right."

In verses 11-22 Bildad attempts to illustrate his point and adds insult to injury. He talks about the fate of the godless man and uses rhetorical questions to force the acceptance of his argument.

11: "Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh?  
Can the rushes grow without water?"

12: "While it is still green *and* not cut down,  
Yet it withers before any *other* plant.

In other words, the papyrus is dependant upon the water to survive and flourish. Job is the papyrus who has withered because his relationship with God has dried up according to Bildad's analogy here. God has removed His blessing from Job because Job has trusted in his prosperity and success rather than in God. Thus, Job is a godless man according to Bildad and his present circumstances prove it according to Bildad who completes the analogy.

13: "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.

Bildad's point is clear. Job has removed his trust from God and placed it in the weakness of this world's structures. But, as we saw in Bildad's counsel in verse 5, If Job would, "seek God and implore the compassion of the Almighty, 6: If he was are pure and upright, Surely now God would rouse Himself for him And restore his righteous estate."

This has to be distressful for Job. What more could he have done? Then, in 16-18, Bildad continues saying that Job is like the gourd vine which he personifies in order to help Job identify with it.

16: "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.

This vine has security because it has entwined itself with the rocks of the earth, its possession if you will, and dislodging it seems impossible. Yet if it is removed the removal is so thorough that the ground itself has no recollection of its being there in the first place and another plant grows in its place. Job has been removed. The ground and rock are metaphors for Job's possessions. Though the godless may prosper for a time, they disappear because their roots are in the earth and not in God. With a sarcastic irony Bildad says, "Behold this is the Joy of his way." ("His" not to be capitalized – and could be translated "its" way.) Bildad interprets his illustrations in verse 20: "Lo, God will not reject *a man of integrity*, Nor will He support the evildoers."

In conclusion, Bildad like Eliphaz before him, promises Job that if he would just recognize his unrighteousness and fall before God that God, 21: "...will yet fill your mouth with laughter And your lips with shouting. 22: "Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, And the tent of the wicked will be no longer."

Both Bildad and Eliphaz see Job as an ungodly, stubborn, unrighteous, stiff-necked, self possessed and self-deceived man. What else could he be since the disasters are positive evidence of this fact? So their arguments are based on what they see, and their theology is what they have been taught. But they are wrong. And because they are wrong, though thinking they are right, they have brought more pain into Job's life.

Unfortunately, the assumption that either God has done this, or that it happened to Job because he deserves it are both erroneous.

What does Job think of all this?

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **CHAPTER NINE**

Job responds with what at first seems a surprising answer in light of his earlier tirade against his friends and their counsel.

Job 9:1-2,

1: Then Job answered,

2: "In truth I know that this is so; But how can a man be in the right before God?"

1-2: But let's not be hasty to assume Job has capitulated to the argument of his friends. His answer may well have set Bildad and his friends at ease, in a satisfied mood – for a brief moment. But we will find out shortly what Job means by his answer is that what these two friends have said about the unrighteous, ungodly and the wicked is true in terms of how God ultimately deals with them, and that God is just and does not pervert what is right. Then, after pondering this, Job begins to have questions about this as well.

So we enter into the process Job goes through in dealing with seemingly contradictory themes. He begins by asking a simple question, "But how can a man be in the right before God?" In Job's mind, he has done everything possible and if he is not right before God, how is it possible for any man? This is not an expression of pride, but of personal quandary. But if God is indeed just as his friends have postulated and to which Job agrees, then Job knows that his level of "unrighteousness" does not rise to the level of recompense he has received – in spite of what his friends assert...if they are right, which we know they are not. Therefore, something's amiss somewhere, because if God is indeed just, then why is Job suffering so greatly? So Job ponders aloud about this.

First he expresses the mystery of God's power, transcendence, omniscience and so on, that is, that God's ways are far beyond our ability to know - as are His thoughts, and any argument we may have about - or with – God is essentially futile. Remember, both men have counseled Job to bring his cause before God and also recognize and admit his iniquities so that God will rise up and restore Job to fellowship. Eliphaz had counseled (5:8), "But as for me, I would seek God, And I would place my cause before God;" And Bildad counsels (8:5-6) "If you would seek God And implore the compassion of the Almighty, If you are pure and upright, Surely now He would rouse Himself for you And restore your righteous estate." But Job rejects this counsel on two Bases: 1) He has not committed iniquities deserving of such grief, and 2) Arguing this point with God is

foolish. Here is how Job expresses this,

9:3-13,

9:3: "If one wished to dispute with Him, He (*a man*) could not answer Him (*God*) once in a thousand *times*. (*i.e., If a man were to try and bring even one word of argument before God, God could point out a thousand flaws, errors and sins to him and the man would have nothing to say*) [Italics mine in this verse.]

4: "Wise in heart and mighty in strength, Who has defied Him without harm? 5: "*It is God* who removes the mountains, they know not *how*, When He overturns them in His anger; 6: Who shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble; 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; 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. 11: "Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; Were He to move past *me*, I would not perceive Him. 12: "Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?' 13: "God will not turn back His anger; Beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab.

Job states that the transcendent sovereignty of the Almighty is such that the counsel of his friends as to what Job should do is useless. The view of God his three friends possess is petty and inadequate, and both God's actions and motives are above reproach. But, if his friends are right in *their* understanding of God, then, as Job stated before, he would abandon such a vacillating and capricious God who inflicts pain for no reason. He comes back to this in a moment.

First, a comment on verse 13. The word "Rahab" does not refer to the heroine of Jericho. Her name is actually spelled differently and pronounced "Rah-chav". Here in Job the word is "Rah-hav" and means the storms or tempestuous monsters of the sea. The English does us a disservice.

Now, as I noted awhile ago, if God is indeed just as his friends have postulated, and to which Job agreed, then Job knows that his level of unrighteousness does not deserve the recompense he has received in spite of what his friends assert. Now, Job heads in a new and disturbing direction. Look at verses 14-17 as it begins to unfold. Because of God's transcendent omnipotence and omniscience he has eloquently described, Job says,

9: 14-17,

14: "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. 16: "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.

Since no creature can resist God's power, and no man can comprehend his counsels and ways; how can Job contend with him? There is a vast inequality here. Job asserts that in His sovereignty, God can afflict him and doesn't need to tell Job why. God does not need to justify His actions to anyone. Job can only throw himself upon the mercy of God, but it is not because of Job's unrighteousness the catastrophes have come upon him. Yet Job is totally helpless to influence God at all and the counsel of his friends imploring him to do so is a waste of breath, primarily because Job has no conscious awareness of iniquities great enough to merit this kind of punishment - though Job's friends have tried to convince him that this is indeed the case. Job just wants to stop hurting. He continues,

18: "He will not allow me to get my breath, *But* saturates me with bitterness. 19: "*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? 20: "Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me; Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty."

Regarding his friends counsel to place his cause before God in a theoretical courtroom so as to understand the justice of God, Job now places his answer in that theoretical courtroom. He notes in verse 19, that a man does not call God to the stand in court to explain His acts. Quite the contrary, and man is powerless and open before such power. In verse 20 Job is not declaring his own righteousness or innocence, since the phrase is in the conditional mood. He is noting that regardless of any righteousness or innocence he may perceive in himself, God can find unrighteousness in him. It increases his pain and bitterness. He only is declaring his own helplessness.

21: "I am guiltless; I do not take notice of myself; I despise my life.

Job leaves the courtroom and draws two bitter conclusions. He is blameless for what has happened but never given thought to it and never has. He just despises his own existence. Then based on this conclusion, he makes quite a statement. God does not seek out the wicked for punishment. There is no justice in the world at all. Therefore, God does not act in a way men think of as just at all.

22: "It is *all* one; therefore I say, 'He destroys the guiltless and the wicked.' 23: "If the scourge kills suddenly, He mocks the despair of the innocent. 24: "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; He covers the faces of its judges. If *it is* not *He*, then who is it?

The little phrase, "It is one", means a person's righteousness or wickedness has nothing to do with whether or not God brings destruction upon them. The planet is under the power of the wicked and justice has been hooded. Then Job asks, "If this is not of God then who?" Here is Job's dilemma and he seeming contradiction. If indeed God is just as Job and his friends think, then why his suffering since Job knows, as do we, that none of the catastrophes are due to his character. His friends, also believing God is just are left with no other conclusion than that Job is so unrighteous he merited God's justice – for his own good of course. Otherwise they would have to consider that God is unjust and if they came to that conclusion, they would have to abandon their faith.

Verses 22-24 are the closest Job comes to stating that God is "unjust". Yet this is not quite what he is saying, yet he has to consider this disturbing thought because of his own situation. And thus we must also do. From the position of one who has suffered immeasurable pain, Job is totally confused and lost. Many have been and are in this situation. So common a challenge, and perhaps the reason the book was written.

Further, in his bitterness, he expands his lament to the world in general and cannot understand why God does nothing to the wicked while the innocent suffer. This is why he says, "He mocks the despair of the innocent". Yet the book is not about why the innocent suffer or perish, for if it were, then Job's friends would be addressing that issue recognizing Job's innocence. And, if they addressed that issue, they would be in the same quandary as Job wondering where the fairness and justice is in all of it and where God is in all of it. God would then be on trial and Job has already made clear the inappropriateness and uselessness of that. Therefore, it becomes clear that the dialogues in the book are to illustrate the inadequacy of man's understanding regardless of how "wise" or "learned" they believe themselves to be.

So we, sitting here are now caught in the dilemma ourselves. Job has forced us to an additional issue, "Whence cometh the indiscriminate injustice and wickedness upon the righteous and unrighteous alike, and why?" To this Job asks the question, "If it is not God, then who?" This question can be viewed with more than one inference. First it could be an question by Job wondering that, if God is indeed just and right, then why is this happening? Perhaps there is some other cause? The idea of blaming Satan does not occur to him and if it had, the question would then be, "If God is truly sovereign and almighty, why would He let Satan do this to me since I am innocent?" But more likely, it might not

be an actual inquiry wondering “who?”, but to underscore that it could be none other than God. In saying this Job stimulates his friends to respond shortly. I think we know already that Job’s friends are not amused by all this. Though Job’s friends are definitely wrong as to the cause of Job’s suffering, they disagree vehemently that God is unjust. God’s justice, in their minds is proven by Job’s suffering. It proves to them that Job has slipped into some ungodliness or iniquity he has not owned up to. We are going in circles. Well let’s ask the questions as we sit in Job’s shoes for a moment. 1. Is God unjust, cruel and uncaring? 2. If not, then is Job’s suffering the result of just actions of God against Job? 3. If not, then who? Now we sit with Job and understand his question.

These are the questions of the ages. Job is confused and lost. But worse, in the midst of unimaginable pain and suffering, down deep he has no answer, though wiser than all his friends combined. Now, he has brought us to the same point and with brutal honesty caused us to consider his position.

Let’s say something about Job’s conclusion in verse 22 to help us right now. He is correct and he is incorrect in one statement. Yes, on the one hand both the guilty and the wicked suffer catastrophes. You might remember Jesus saying it this way, God “causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45)

However, is Job correct in stating that it is God who destroys both the righteous and the wicked dispassionately and indiscriminately? This is an important question. Job is also correct in asking, “How can a man be righteous before God?” His friends have already proclaimed that a man cannot. Yet the scripture makes it clear that Job was righteous by the same means we are righteous. What is that?

But Job is not thinking clearly right now and who would in his shoes? We are now at a crossroads with Job and his friends. He will now go down one and we resist it and rightly so. His friends are going down another we know is the wrong road. So where do we go? There is a third road that will be presented at the end of this chapter in the appendix..

The lament about why the prosperity of the wicked and the poverty of the poor is a common one in scripture, often causing God’s people great confusion and wonder. Now, let me note something of importance for us here, and that is that this subject will be targeted by both Job and his friends for the next few chapters. It will be a rather fun ride as we see Job’s friends make the most ridiculous statements because they are insistent on their point about God’s justice. We will see their point clearly in a moment.

Psalm 73 for example, and though it is titled A Psalm of Asaph, it could be the Psalm of Job.

- 1: A Psalm of Asaph. "Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart!"
- 2: "But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped."

This is Job's position as well, but he has not yet thought it through thoroughly, primarily because his friends have thrown stumbling blocks in his way.

- 3: "For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked."
- 4: "For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat."
- 5: "They are not in trouble *as other* men, Nor are they plagued like mankind."
- 6: "Therefore pride is their necklace; The garment of violence covers them."
- 7: "Their eye bulges from fatness; The imaginations of *their* heart run riot."
- 8: "They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; They speak from on high."
- 9: "They have set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue parades through the earth."
- 10: "Therefore his people return to this place, And waters of abundance are drunk by them."
- 11: "They say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?"
- 12: "Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth."

Job is now wondering about the prosperity of the wicked and it has caused him to question his friends counsel about God's justice. Later on his friends deny that what is said by Job and this Psalm is true. The next four verses could have been written by Job.

- 13: "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence;"
- 14: "For I have been stricken all day long And chastened every morning."
- 15: "If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children."
- 16: "When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight."

The Psalmist, like Job is confused by what he perceives to be God's inequitable justice in dealing with men. Like Job's three friends, he is sure that God's justice is revealed in the condition of man's circumstances. So, since he is stricken and chastened every morning, it seems useless to try to keep his heart pure and his hands clean. This is where Job is with his friends at the moment. We will return there shortly. But the Psalmist goes on and begins to change his thinking.

- 17: "Until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I perceived their end."

- 18: "Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction."  
19: "How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!"  
20: "Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form."  
21: "When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within,"  
22: "Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before You."

Now the Psalmist relegates God's justice to the action and sovereignty of God and realizes that God is indeed aware of what is going on and has it all covered. He then confesses that his responses based on his own ideas about God's justice were inappropriate and stupid. Job and his friends have not gotten there yet. The Psalmist concludes,

- 23: "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand."  
24: "With Your counsel You will guide me, And afterward receive me to glory."  
25: "Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And besides You, I desire nothing on earth."

The Psalmist realizes that earthly wealth or lack of wealth is a moot point because his fellowship with God is of greater value than any earthly possession.

- 26: "My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."  
27: "For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You."  
28: "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works."

The conclusion the Psalmist came to is the answer to all our questions, all our odd theology, as well as the questions about the Book of Job and to life in general. This is where Job ultimately rests as well. But note the Psalmist came "close to stumbling". What I am attempting to do in this study is to keep us from stumbling or causing other to stumble. Too many have stumbled over all these matters. Some, sadly, may never get up.

Now, going back to the conflict between Job and his friends, let's consider a syllogism for a moment. Syllogisms are not found directly in the Bible, but Job's friends virtually present one as they argue. In case you have forgotten, here is an example of a proper syllogism:

- "All Zebras have stripes."  
"That animal is a Zebra."

“Therefore it must have stripes.”

Here are examples of faulty syllogisms:

First, a syllogism with one faulty premise:

“All Zebras have stripes.”

“That animal has stripes.”

“Therefore, that animal must be a Zebra.” (No, it could be a tiger, etc.)

Second one faulty step upon which a false premise is built:

“All Zebras are animals.”

“That is an animal”

“Therefore it must have stripes”

Job’s friends have created an argument that can be put into a syllogism. I want you to decide how many, if any faulty premises it might contain.

“God is always just and never perverts justice.”

“Justice means that He prospers the righteous and punishes the wicked.”

“Job must be wicked because he is being punished.”

How many faulty premises does this syllogism contain? (Two).

“God is always just and never perverts justice.” But only to His view of what true justice is all about, not ours.

“Suffering can only be the result of God’s justice.”

“Therefore Job did something to warrant God’s justice.”

In chapter four Eliphaz said, “Remember now, who *ever* perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?” Have you ever heard of any innocent and upright suffering or perishing?”

Right now, Job thinks, “God either perverted justice or is unjust if I suffer without cause.” But only if he buys into this syllogism. He is incorrect, of course.

But that is where Job is and that is where many Christians are and sadly where many non-Christians are who suffer and wonder about God.

We often ask the question, “If God is so powerful and loving then why does He or doesn’t He...?” But do we ever consider the question, “If man were not disobedient to God and evil then...?”

**In the appendix at this point is an interlude that deals with the frequent question of the nature of God and where He is in the midst of all the tragedies.**

Job has come to the place where he wonders if God just doesn’t care at all whether a man lives righteously or not since the wicked seemed to be the ones that prosper and the righteous simply suffer. So far, we have dismissed all their arguments with clear Biblical teaching.

Meanwhile, sometime during the early debate another man showed up, dismounted and sat with the group. This man was younger than any of the rest and has not spoken a word. He has listened patiently thus far and will do so for a while more. In fact, he will not make his appearance until chapter 32. His name is Elihu.

But at the present, Job is fatalistic and depressed, hopeless and defeated, having no understanding or respite, thinking it matters not if he is righteous, good, wicked or anything at all, and that no matter what he says or does, God doesn’t care one way or another about him. In bitterness Job succumbs to self pity. Looking at 9:25-31, let’s note some of the similar themes we saw in Psalm 73:

Job 9:25-31, 25: "Now my days are swifter than a runner; They flee away, they see no good. 26: "They slip by like reed boats, Like an eagle that swoops on its prey. 27: "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 You will not acquit me. 29: "I am accounted wicked, Why then should I toil in vain? (Ps. 73:13) “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence;...” 30: "If I should wash myself with snow And cleanse my hands with lye, 31: Yet You would plunge me into the pit, And my own clothes would abhor me.

Here Job, like the Psalmist, feels that it is useless to live righteously and purely because there is neither any point to it nor reward for doing so. One the one hand, this is true. Then why live righteously? Is it only for the reward or blessing? This was Satan’s claim in the prelude...that God’s faithful are only fair weather believers. Satan was proven wrong. Are God’s people only fair weather believers? Taking those who walk with God and trust Him regardless of the weather, such as the Apostle Paul, there must be another

reason to be faithful to God! I'll let you think about that while we consider whether we are just fair weather disciples.

But Job continues to trust God in spite of his pain and suffering, even when he is conflicted about, "why?" So even Job must have an inner sense that there is something bigger and more important here than what he is seeing and experiencing.

Moving on, again Job recognizes the foolishness of his friends counsel to appeal to God and present a case before Him.

Job 9:32-35, 32: "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. 34: "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.

If there was an advocate or arbiter that could be summoned in Job's defense that had equal power and authority with God, then Job might have the courage to speak and state his case. But Job is not able to be his own advocate or arbiter. So he slumps in intense bitterness and resignation to wonder about, without answer or help - the justice of God. There is, of course no help from his friends, only condemnation.

Two things:

1. The advocate/arbiter. This passage in Job is amazing as he prefigures not just his need but all of mankind's need...a need fulfilled in Jesus who, as John says, "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1). Since Jesus existed in God before all creation, He was Job's advocate as well. Job just didn't know it as yet.

2. His friend's condemnation of Job. My personal experience - 1984-1990. In 1984, I suffered a complete spiritual, psychological collapse. I woke up one morning believing that God had rejected me and that I had lost my salvation. I had no sense of the Spirit in my life and I was terrified. I went into a deep depression and contemplated suicide. I have been where Job is in terms of the desire to die and the horrifying thought that I had been abandoned. Physiologically I suffered many terrible symptoms. I went to doctors, and psychologists and they could not help me. I could no longer work and had to resign my position in the church. So I called pastors in the area that I knew, some quite well known and with big churches or successful ministries. None had any word for me except to say that they felt I was being punished by God for just cause. Every passage of scripture I turned to seemed to condemn me. I finally turned to the pastor of my home church in California and he and a missionary I respected came to Phoenix to counsel me. After I

told them every detail of my experience, their counsel was to tell me that I was getting what I deserved because I had left my calling, turned my back on God walked away from Him. I was crushed. It was quite the opposite in my mind. I felt that God had walked away from me...deservingly so, but He took the action in my mind.

It took some five years for me to come out of the darkness. My family suffered with me through those days. Only one person in the entire nation was found to aid me in my recovery. His message was about God's grace and love and how vast that was. He assured me that Jesus' death on the cross covered my sins and failures and that was not the reason for my suffering. He proved by the scriptures that this was true and that my restoration was more a matter of my heart and of my understanding than of God's imposing such a horror on my life.

He was right. I simply did not know the real gospel, the fullness of the "good news" as I thought I did. My theology was distorted in the same way as those who tried to counsel me, and after all, it was from them I had learned it in the first place. Though the worst experience of my life, this was the most important experience of my life. I came to know and understand the love God has for me and for all of us. I became more excited about being a Christian than ever before and now had a message of hope rather than works and fear.

So I have met Job's friends. I don't like them any more than Job liked his. But I understand their self righteous point of view and why they hold it. And I reject it just like Job does his friend's. So the next few verses are not just Job's, but have been mine and maybe yours.

Continuing -

Job 10:1-3,"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 You contend with me. 3: 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress, To reject the labor of Your hands, And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?"

Again Job brings this up. Again he asks, "why"? Why should he suffer so in his innocence while the wicked are receiving favor for their evil schemes? His friends will disagree with Job that the wicked receive favor or prosper, but only in order to buttress their case that Job must be among the wicked. But we have established that circumstances of life do not reflect the justice of God at all. So as Job considers this we

know he is off track as much as his friends are when they see he is suffering and thus conclude he must be wicked.

Now to make sure that Bob is on track these past few weeks, let's look at Luke 9:51-56 for a moment.

51: When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52: and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53: But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54: When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55: But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56: for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village."

Their thought was to be like Elijah (II Kings 1:10-12) when he called down fire from heaven to consume the emissaries of Azariah, King of Israel. But the circumstances were quite different here. But the point of bringing this up is to illustrate that the same idea of how God deals with men we see in Job, is still entrenched in the minds of the disciples, and in the minds of Christians even today. Thus the difficulty I have with trying to dismantle it.

**THE BOOK OF JOB**  
**CHAPTERS TEN-TWELVE**  
**CONDENSED SUMMARY**

Job 10:1-3,

1: "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 You contend with me. 3: 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress, To reject the labor of Your hands, And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?"

Again Job brings this up. Again he asks, "Why"? Why should he suffer so in his innocence while the wicked are receiving favor for their evil schemes? His friends will disagree with Job that the wicked receive favor or prosperity because to do so would undermine their case against Job as their case is that Job must be among the wicked because of his suffering.

But we have established that circumstances of his life do not reflect the justice of God at all. Then Job accuses God of being senseless by rejecting His own work, namely Job himself. So as Job considers this we know he is off track as much as his friends are when they see he is suffering and thus conclude he must be therefore be wicked.

Now summarizing 10:4-17, Job debates his innocence before God but is bitter that even so, he is not delivered from his afflictions. Job 10:7, "According to Your knowledge I am indeed not guilty, Yet there is no deliverance from Your hand." This demonstrates Job's conviction that, if God is just in the way his friends claim and to which Job has no answer, then God must be unjust. Yet, as we will see, Job is not content with this conclusion. But he has no other answer so, going on with this lament, in 14-16, Job concludes that it doesn't matter whether he conducts his life in a godly manner or not because it doesn't seem to matter to God since God has poured all this out on him.

He is right in one sense that catastrophes happen to people regardless of whether their spiritual life is righteous or not. But he is wrong to assume that the vacillating, capricious, indiscriminate suffering of man comes from a God of similar character. Still, in his present condition and understanding, he has no other resource from which to gain insight or wisdom. His friends not only make it worse, and are wrong, but simply inflict more pain on Job. And these are apparently the wisest men in the world. Perhaps God's ways are higher than theirs?

So in bitterness, defeat and anger Job concludes that indeed God has done this and that it demonstrates that God must be unjust - because he, (Job) is innocent. In this anguish, with his distorted understanding of God's love and justice; then feeling he has been unjustly punished and abandoned by God - added to his friends betrayal and painful counsel piled upon his already agonizing physical and emotional torment - Job wishes once again he had not been born or had died at birth as he states in 18-19. I can fully appreciate Job's despair as I illustrated in my own experience.

And now the response of Job's third friend, Zophar the Naamathite who, from verses 1-11 of chapter eleven, comes up with nothing that hasn't already been said by the others to criticize Job, and even parrots Job in places. But in verse 12, in a final insult hurled at Job Zophar says, "An idiot (foolish man) will become intelligent When the foal of a wild donkey is born a man." In other words, there is no hope that an idiot like Job will ever have any intelligence any more than a man will be born of a wild donkey. He continues to implore the "wicked and unrighteous" Job to confess and repent so that God will raise Him up. These guys need a new drum to beat. Here is what Zophar says:

11:13-20,

13: "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*. 17: "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."

This last statement, though in the third person, is directed straight at Job, "the wicked" whose only hope, according to Zophar, is to die. Thus ends the first series of speeches by Job and his three friends. With friends like these, who needs enemies? So we will move from calling them his friends to calling them his companions, and that is being too gracious.

Job's sarcastic retort to his companions, is precious.

12:1-2,

1: "Then Job responded, 2: 'Truly then you are the people, And with you wisdom will die!'"

This leaves us, the reader, with a twelve chapters of answers and wisdom from both Job and his three friends and we find, apart from a few glimpses of truthful insight primarily by Job, that everything they have said is wrong. Sitting quietly and patiently by is a fourth man, Elihu, younger than the others, but listening. I can tell you in advance that Elihu is beginning to get frustrated at what he hears. Yet it will be another 20 chapters before he speaks. But now, Job continues:

12:3-4,

3: "But I have intelligence as well as you; I am not inferior to you. And who does not know such things as these? 4: "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." (One to be made sport of or mocked)

Note 13:2-5 for a moment where Job repeats this same sentiment about his companions:

2: "What you know I also know; I am not inferior to you. 3: "But I would speak to the Almighty, And I desire to argue with God. 4: "But you smear with lies; You are all worthless physicians. 5: "O that you would be completely silent, And that it would become your wisdom!"

Now, back to 12:6-10, and please note that much of what Job laments about is simply not true any more than God prospers the wicked and oppresses the poor is true. But it is the thinking of the Jew in his day and later on as we saw last week. So here we endure Job's cynical generalizations and bitter assumptions about God as he speaks to his companions:

6: "The tents of the destroyers prosper, And those who provoke God are secure, Whom God brings into their power". 7: "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. 9: "Who among all these does not know That the hand of the LORD has done this, 10: In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?" Now to verses 17-22:

17: "He makes counselors walk barefoot And makes fools of judges. 18: "He loosens the bond of kings And binds their loins with a girdle. 19: "He makes priests walk barefoot And overthrows the secure ones. 20: "He deprives the trusted ones of speech And takes away the discernment of the elders. 21: "He pours contempt on nobles And loosens the belt of the strong."

Much of this is just bitter prattle that sounds eloquent but contradicts not only everything he has already said but scripture as well. Then does Job speak next about the United States of America and its political leaders?

23: "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."

Sounds about where our country is today. But is this really God's doing?

Verse 25 is interesting, "They grope in darkness with no light, And He makes them stagger like a drunken man." Job is like a dog with a bone. What he is not realizing, and which many do not realize is that man is born in the darkness, chooses the darkness over light and so wanders and stumbles. The more I study the Word of God and the older I become; I have come to realize the power of the choice with which we are all endowed.

The free will God gave us is the basis for the good and evil in the world. As I asked sometime ago, the question isn't, "Why doesn't God do something about the evil in the world?" But, "What would the world be like if all chose to believe in Jesus and love God and his fellowman as God desires?" All of God's judgments on nations and peoples in the Old Testament were not arbitrary. They all came as a result of the disobedience and idolatry, wickedness and evil of the people and their leaders. The prophets of God even gave the leaders insight and choices to make regarding their direction and spiritual life, and laid out the consequences of choosing poorly, much like God did with Adam and Eve in the garden. And when they choose poorly they suffered the consequences. So Job and his companions

So the scripture states, in contrast to Job's cynicism that God manipulates everyone and everything, the following:

Ephesians 5:6-16, 6: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8: for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the

Lord; walk as children of Light 9: (for the fruit of the Light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10: trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11: Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12: for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13: But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. 14: For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." 15: Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16: making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."

John 1:6-7, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

What Job and his companions do not understand is that God has created man in His own image and as such gave man dominion over the creation God had made. Man was given the authority and the freedom in creation as illustrated by man's freely naming all the creatures God had created on the earth as stated in Genesis 2:19-20. It was man's free choice to then give over his authority and dominion to the serpent by acceding to his temptation, God having given a complete warning of the consequences for doing so...(which was ignored then as it is now.)

When man did so, he became accountable to God and God kicked him out of paradise to run his own life as it were. And so here we are. Job and his friends cast all the misery and tragedy of life upon God when all they had to do was look in the mirror. The simple statement, "We have met the enemy and they is us" is a far better theology than anything Job and his companions have come up with so far regardless of how eloquently they have expressed their views.

Joshua 24:15: "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve..."

Proverbs 3:31: "Do not envy a man of violence, And do not choose any of his ways."

Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants..."

The power to choose still remains with us today as do the consequences of those choices.

I weary of accusation statements like, "Why did (or does) God allow these things to happen?" My response is, "Why don't YOU ALLOW God to mandate the way you live your life? Jesus said it best, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTERS THIRTEEN-EIGHTEEN CONDENSED SUMMARY

In the book “Stone of Farewell” by Tad Williams, a medieval war involving good against evil is occurring and the hero, a young man named Simon, has suffered the loss of friends he cherished including one named Haestan. It is winter, very cold, provisions are scarce and life is miserable. Simon speaks to his friend Sludig and says, “Where is Haestan?” “What do you mean?” Sludig cocked his head. “You know where we left him Simon.” “No, I mean where is Haestan?” “The real Haestan.” “Ah”, Sludig smiled, “His soul is in heaven with the Lord God.” “No”. Simon turned to look at the sky again, darkening now with the first mortal blue of night. “What? Why do you say that?” Sludig asked. “He’s not in heaven. There is no heaven.” Simon replied.

“How can you be so foolish?” Sludig stared at Simon for a moment trying to sense Simon’s thoughts. He placed his hand on Simon’s shoulder. “God knows what He knows. Come and sit down.” “How could God let people die for no reason?” Simon demanded, hugging himself as though trying to keep something inside. “If God can do that then He is cruel. If He isn’t cruel, well then....He just can’t do anything. He’s like an old man who sits at the window but can’t go out. He’s old and stupid.”

“Do not talk against God the Father,” Sludig said, his voice chilly. “God will not be mocked by an ungrateful boy. He has given you all the gifts of life...” “It’s a lie”, Simon shouted. The soldiers eyes widened in surprise. Heads turned from the campfire looking to the sudden noise. “It’s a lie, a lie. What gifts? To crawl around like a bug here and there, trying to find something to eat, somewhere to sleep...and then without warning something smashes you? What kind of a gift is that? You do the right thing... and fight against evil like the book says and if you do that you get killed. The bad ones live on and grow rich and laugh at the good ones. It’s a stupid lie!”

“That is terrible, Simon!” Sludig said, his voice also rising. “You speak from madness and grief...” “It’s a lie, and you are an idiot to believe it!” Simon yelled, throwing his wood down at Sludig’s feet. He turned and ran down the mountain path with a great grieving pain in his middle that almost took his breath away."

Even in a fictional novel, the author states these common thoughts in the mouth of his hero. Thoughts we all may have had at one time or another. The book of Job addresses these thoughts. But it exposes the fallacies of the both the premises held and the conclusions drawn from statements or thoughts like these. Yet we are yet to see any real

answers to these questions in Job and have had to rely on what additional scriptures teach as they grapple with the same issues.

In our story, like Simon and Sludig, Job and his companions are in the midst of a similar Discussion about God's supposed unjust treatment regarding the wicked and the righteous. Job has said, about the wicked,

Job 9:24 "The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;

To God Job complains, Job 10:3 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress, To reject the labor of Your hands, And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?

Job 12:6 "The tents of the destroyers prosper, And those who provoke God are secure, Whom God brings into their power.

Now we see clearly convoluted theology. Job, who is not wicked, despite what his companions state, is in turmoil and confusion over why he should suffer. If God prospers the wicked, and he is wicked, then he should prosper. But he is not wicked, so he is pressed to think that God must indeed be unjust, yet is dissatisfied with that conclusion as much as he is dissatisfied with his friends conclusion that God is totally just and His justice is demonstrated in Job's suffering proving to them that Job must be an unrighteous and wicked man. Only the wicked suffer so. His friends are appalled and angered that Job would accuse God of venting His wrath on him without cause and thus questioning the justice of God.

Job of course, disagrees. He says that the wicked do prosper. Here he is partially correct. Sometime they do and sometimes they don't. He also says that God has brought all this pain on Him without cause. Here he is also partially correct in that there is no cause in himself for his suffering it but he is wrong in claiming that it reflects God's injustice. Job doesn't know whether to hold the same view about God's justice as do his friends. After all, he was righteous and prospered, so how can he hold the view that the wicked prosper? His friends don't buy this of course and feel he is getting his just desserts. Of course, we have demonstrated several times that all four men are incorrect. Yet Job is confused by it as he sees the wicked prosper in spite of what his friends argue. Other places in scripture show a wonderment about this as well such as Psalm 73 which we have reviewed. Remember the Psalmist said,

73:2, "But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped."

73:3, "For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

73:4, "For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat."

73:5, "They are not in trouble *as other* men, Nor are they plagued like mankind."

73:12, "Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth."

And like Job complains he concludes,

73:13, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure And washed my hands in innocence;"

The lesson for us should become crystal clear. God's justice is revealed at the cross and not in the circumstances of life. It is very difficult for us not to think that God brings on disaster to nations and peoples because he is judging or exercising His justice as it were. We think like Job's friends all the time. Even after all this study time someone wondered about this possibility.

Yet, as I said, Job is not content with this conclusion, nor with his own. We know this from things he says such as:

Job 13:15-18,

15: "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him. 16: "This also will be my salvation, For a godless man may not come before His presence. 17: "Listen carefully to my speech, And let my declaration *fill* your ears. 18: "Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated."

And,

Job 14:7-17,

7: "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. 10: "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 are no longer, He will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep. 13: "Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, That You would conceal me until Your wrath returns *to You*, That You would set a limit for me and remember me! 14: "If a man dies, will he live *again*? All the days of my struggle I will wait Until my change comes. 15: "You will call, and I will answer You; You will long

for the work of Your hands. 16: "For now You number my steps, You do not observe my sin. 17: "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, And You wrap up my iniquity."

So Job is not nearly assured of his conclusions as his friends are. This puts him at their mercy of course. In actuality, prosperity or poverty, success or suffering are not related at all to whether a person is righteous or wicked. So both Job and his companions are lacking understanding. Nevertheless the argument now journeys down this trail, Job's friends trying to prove that the wicked do not enjoy prosperity, at least for long. They want to emphasize this because if the wicked prosper, then their theological presumptions that God inflicts tragedy only upon the wicked will dismantle their argument that Job is suffering due to his wickedness. So Job and his friends are at an impasse.

Here are a few of the arguments in which Job's companions insist that those who suffer must be wicked, and thus the recipients of God's justice.

For Eliphaz, who applies all this to Job says,

Job 15:15-25,

15: "Behold, He (*God*) 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! 17: "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. 20: "The wicked man writhes in pain all *his* days, And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless. 21: "Sounds of terror are in his ears; While at peace the destroyer comes upon him. 22: "He does not believe that he will return from darkness, And he is destined for the sword. 23: "He wanders about for food, saying, 'Where is it?' He knows that a day of darkness is at hand. 24: "Distress and anguish terrify him, They overpower him like a king ready for the attack, 25: Because he has stretched out his hand against God And conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty."

In other words, the wicked not only do not prosper, but writhes in pain all his days at the thought of the consequences of his wickedness. Of course Eliphaz has applied all this to Job albeit in the third person. But the argument is stupid, and Job knows this and I am sure his eyes are rolling around in his head. But Eliphaz' companions are nodding in agreement. This reminds of the T.V. show "Family feud". The question is, "Name something that squeals." And the contestant says, "A ham sandwich". And his team applauds saying, "Good answer, good answer." So Eliphaz is totally out of touch with God, reality and common sense.

Job's response to him is, 16:2-3,

2: "I have heard many such things; Sorry comforters are you all. 3: "Is there *no* limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer?"

During the rest of chapters 16 and 17 Job breaks down and weeps. His life, once beautiful is destroyed, his days are past. Those once his friends are now his tormentors. He questions whether he has hope, but if so it is only in God.

Note: 16:19-22

19: "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, And my advocate is on high. 20: "My friends are my scoffers; My eye weeps to God. 21: "O that a man might plead with God As a man with his neighbor! 22: "For when a few years are past, I shall go the way of no return.

But the three companions reject the expression of Job's pain and wonder. With Eliphaz' declaration that the wicked writes in pain all his days and will ultimately be destroyed, his friends now jump on the bandwagon.

Bildad says ,

Job 18:1-21,

1: Then Bildad the Shuhite responded, 2: "How long will you hunt for words? Show understanding and then we can talk. 3: "Why are we regarded as beasts, As stupid in your eyes? 4: "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? 5: "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."

Then directed at Job he speaks of the wicked man,

18:12-15,

12: "His strength is famished, And calamity is ready at his side. 13: "His skin is devoured by disease, The firstborn of death devours his limbs. 14: "He is torn from the security of his tent, And they march him before the king of terrors. 15: "There dwells in his tent nothing of his; Brimstone is scattered on his habitation."

18:19-21,

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."

Well, there may be some truth in some of this, of course regarding the wicked. But the intent of these men is to apply it to Job. And in this they are wrong and do not speak the truth. So if we take the truth and misapply it, do we then speak the truth? Satan did this with Jesus. Remember the account when:

Matthew 4:5-7, 5: Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6: and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 7: Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

Satan spoke the true word of God but applied it in a totally illegitimate way by trying to use it to deceive and manipulate for the goal of achieving power over another or gaining something for himself. However, Job's friends are not like Satan because their motives were not like this at all. They just used applied truth incorrectly. But they were still rebuked by God.

Still they are lost in their ability to come up with anything substantial. Reminds me of the preacher who wrote in his notes, "Weak point, shout louder." It occurs to me that this is often the way we are. We may apply truth incorrectly in somehow wanting to correct others or simply shout more loudly when our point is weak. After all we have seen of the counsel Job's friends have given him and have rightly rejected it as something we would employ, now we see the way in which they do this and need to reject this method as well.

If nothing else in studying this book, at least let us learn what not to ask, say and do in catastrophic times whether they be ours or another's.

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **CHAPTERS NINETEEN-TWENTY ONE** **CONDENSED SUMMARY**

Would you agree that Job has reasons to complain, cry, be discouraged, wonder why this suffering was brought upon him especially as he thinks God may have done it without cause? Does he have cause to be upset, even angry, with life, God and his friends? I was thinking that here we are in a blessed and luxurious setting, with privileges and rights, jobs and income, hope and salvation and yet we, without real cause often find ourselves complaining, griping and whining over the smallest things, things much more insignificant than what Job is suffering. I wonder why we are like this. Hard to be content with what we have it seems. Philippians 4:11, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am." I Timothy 6:8, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."

But in the midst of another's pain or even our own, or even within prosperity or poverty it is hard to be content. We do seek wisdom during these times. Wisdom is good and Job's friends have tried to convey their wisdom and have made a miserable mess of things. But there is something better. To love or be loved is far superior. Here Job's friends are totally lacking and Job's greatest need, to be understood and to be loved is withheld from him.

So if anyone has reason to be in a funk about life, God, the world, and his friends it is Job. We last left Job weeping before the Lord as his companions sat by and attacked him. Job and his friends are now arguing, even shouting in their infinite wisdom, how God exhibits His justice toward the wicked and the righteous. Job's companions have gone to extreme lengths to try and convince Job that wicked men not only do not prosper but are in pain all their days. They are forced to this position because they have postulated that Job's suffering can only be due to his wickedness - clearly demonstrated by the catastrophic destruction of his life, including his possessions, his family and his health which, in their minds, is God's righteous judgment upon wicked men. Thus, in their stubborn thinking, Job must be wicked. They are wrong of course, but to buttress their belief, they move to the absurd argument that the wicked never prosper, at least not for long, and that only the righteous prosper. They place themselves in this category, of course.

Job knows that what they say is wrong and that he is innocent, but can't understand why he is enduring such suffering. Though he agrees that God is just and righteous, he is still terribly confused and hurt that, in his mind, God has poured all this out upon him without cause. Is God then unjust? Job is lost. And here is where we all must stop and think

about these things because most have had these disturbing thoughts or beliefs that often lead to a departing from the faith.

So, Job's friends are convinced they are right and are assaulting Job in his weakened and confused state, trying to break down what they think is his pride. But they are simply succeeding in tearing him apart even further.

So in chapter 19 Job wails against the insensitivity and stupidity of these men. He defends himself and charges God with bringing all this upon him without cause.

Note 19:6-7,

6: "Know then that God has wronged me And has closed His net around me. 7: "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice."

This shows Job's theological dilemma. He is wrong about this in one sense and right in another. Where he is wrong is in his assumption that God is unjust and that indeed the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. His friends are disagreeing and saying that the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper because this is the true reflection of God's justice. Thus Job must be wicked. All of them are confused of course, and are arguing over something that is essentially useless. But their confusion is the very reason the book exists because God's people are often confused about this as well - as we have discussed.

Now, Job cries because all abhor him, even his wife. Note: 19:13-22

13: "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. 15: "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. 17: "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. 20: "My bone clings to my skin and my flesh, And I have escaped *only* by the skin of my teeth. 21: "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, For the hand of God has struck me. 22: "Why do you persecute me as God *does*, And are not satisfied with my flesh?"

Job's pain is evident and he speaks from the depths of his terrible suffering. But he takes a deep breath and then makes a strong statement of faith albeit partially based on what he truthfully perceives to be his own righteous standing before God.

23: "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!

What Job means by this is that he desires his case to remain after his own death so that all can see that he was ultimately innocent, yet as far as he is concerned that is of little consequence since he will himself be vindicated by God. He is, of course, throwing this in the face of his accusers. Nevertheless, Job begins to make a turn.

25: "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

This is a wonderful expression of faith in that Job is confident that even after his own death, his redeemer will still live and Job will be vindicated. Though he has complained about God's treatment of him he believes that even so, God will vindicate him one day and that he (Job) will see God. Notice verse 26. We will see next week that Job begins to think differently about his suffering, its cause and its result. But now we see a movement in his despair to a place of hope. As we are all aware, when we believe all hope is gone, we become depressed to the point of such darkness that like Job, we wish for death. And though Job's friends give him no comfort, love or hope, somewhere down in the depths of his soul something in generate, even if it is a "grasping of straws".

26: "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27: Whom I myself shall behold, And whom my eyes will see and not another (a stranger). My heart faints within me!"

Job expresses a hope, even a confidence that somehow though his flesh is gone and his bones turned to dust that in someway he will yet be able to behold God, and not only behold Him but do so as someone familiar. He, in spite of it all, will not throw his faith onto the ash heap. He recognizes neither he nor his companions have all the answers and so he will not cast away his faith due to ignorance. Job warns his companions about their glib accusations before the Lord who knows Job is innocent of anything approaching a cause for his suffering.

Note 28-29:

28: "If you say, 'How shall we persecute him?' And 'What pretext for a case against him can we find?' 29: "*Then* be afraid of the sword for yourselves, For wrath *brings* the punishment of the sword, So that you may know there is judgment."

Now Zophar is angered because Job has turned God's justice upon him and his friends  
Because they have misrepresented God.

Job 20:1-8,

1: Then Zophar the Naamathite answered, 2: "Therefore my disquieting thoughts make me respond, Even because of my inward agitation. 3: "I listened to the reproof which insults me, And the spirit of my understanding makes me answer."

In other words, "You are nuts Job." Then he returns to the weary theme.

4: "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? 6: "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."

He goes on and concludes, in 26 still speaking about the wicked, applying all to Job of course,

26: Complete darkness is held in reserve for his treasures, And un-fanned fire will devour him; It will consume the survivor in his tent. 27: "The heavens will reveal his iniquity, And the earth will rise up against him. 28: "The increase of his house will depart; *His possessions* will flow away in the day of His anger. 29: "This is the wicked man's portion from God, Even the heritage decreed to him by God."

Zophar, along with Eliphaz and Bildad must emphasize that the wicked not only do not prosper, but disintegrate. Otherwise, they cannot explain Job's situation. To them, Job's catastrophic tragedy, which both they and Job believes God brought upon him, is the clear demonstration of his wickedness to Job's friends but to Job, of God's injustice.

But Job once again disagrees.

21:7-13,

7: "Why do the wicked *still* live, Continue on, also become very powerful? 8: "Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring before their eyes, 9: Their houses are safe from fear, And the rod of God is not on them. 10: "His ox mates without fail; His cow calves and does not abort. 11: "They send forth their little ones like the flock, And their children skip about. 12: "They sing to the timbrel

and harp And rejoice at the sound of the flute. 13: "They spend their days in prosperity,  
And suddenly they go down to Sheol."

This of course is as absurd as his companions assertion that they wail in pain all their days.

Then Job concludes in verse 34, "How then will you vainly comfort me, For your answers remain *full of falsehood*?"

These four men have spent 21 chapters arguing over that which is not even germane just because Jobs' friends, though thinking themselves wise theological geniuses have imposed their idea of why Job is suffering upon him and in his defense, job has been sucked into the argument and 21 chapters later they stand at an impasse.

We who teach and counsel, despite how convinced we are of our understanding of the ways of God or the teachings of the Bible still need to remain in a place where we are available to learning and growing, changing and developing, in our understanding because that in itself is wisdom. Learning of the ways of the Lord is a far deeper enterprise than most of us realize. As we have illustrated in the book of Job itself, our assumptions and thoughts about the book, our own thinking about God and evil, tragedy and catastrophe, human suffering, and so many other issues, can often be flawed, inadequate and even incorrect, especially when it comes to guiding others. But we are learning, changing and growing because of this book (I hope) as many of our own assumptions are being challenged.

None of us are perfect in our grasp of all the Lord's ways since His are so far above ours. But we must persevere on to greater understanding and usefulness. And this is not the greatest pursuit despite the scriptures instruction to gain wisdom. We see Job's friends, wise men in their own eyes, but lacking love, compassion and understanding. These are elements that surpass knowledge and wisdom. To know much about the truth of God and His word is good, to love much is superior.

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **CHAPTERS TWENTY TWO - TWENTY FOUR** **CONDENSED SUMMARY**

I think we are getting the flow of this book and understanding what is going on and allowing our minds to be renewed in understanding. This is good. We will again accelerate our pace a little and move toward the conclusion and then begin a series where we examine answers to a lot of questions raised in this study.

We now move to the third and final set of speeches (soliloquys) between Job and his companions. To this point Job has proposed that he is not the wicked man his companions assert and that his suffering is not the result of a just God pouring out tragedy on him because of his wickedness. But he has no idea why he is suffering, yet with his companions he does believe in a just God. In this Job is much like us, wondering about suffering, evil and tragedy in the world and where God is in all of it. And, like Job's friends, we come up with ideas, platitudes, statements that are well intended but fall short of giving the world what it needs most, truth and love.

Job's suffering has caused him to question whether or not God is truly just. He is not alone in wondering about that as well. He is in pain, confusion, depression and simply wants to die. His friends have no answers for him that reveal truth, no help for him that reveals any true compassion, love or even concern for him. Job's only hope then, is that after he pays the heavy and final price thrust upon him undeservedly, God will vindicate him.

Now, in chapter 22 Eliphaz, exasperated with Job, resorts to sarcasm in verses 1-4.

22:1-4,

1: Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded, 2: "Can a vigorous man be of use to God, Or a wise man be useful to himself?"

By this rhetorical question he means that a vigorous man can neither add to nor subtract from God any more than a wise man can counsel himself when in a quandary - like Job of course. He goes on even more sarcastically.

3: "Is there any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, Or profit if you make your ways perfect? 4: "Is it because of your reverence that He reproves you, That He enters into judgment against you?"

Then he asks a question of Job.

Job 22:5, "Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquities without end?"

So we know where Eliphaz and his companions are, don't we...and we know they are in error 100%. Eliphaz then goes on to list the wicked acts of Job, all of them false of course, imagined in Eliphaz' mind in order to justify his own conclusion that Job is wicked and that his pain is a direct result of God judging him for his wickedness. We will not take the time to read all of his nonsense, but we can see a sample in 6-10.

22:6-10,

6: "For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, And stripped men naked. 7: "To the weary you have given no water to drink, And from the hungry you have withheld bread. 8: "But the earth belongs to the mighty man, And the honorable man dwells in it. 9: "You have sent widows away empty, And the strength of the orphans has been crushed. 10: "Therefore snares surround you, And sudden dread terrifies you,..." Etc.

This is in contrast to what Eliphaz said to Job in 4:3-4, "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."

Now Eliphaz and his companions, in their absurdity, are ripping Job apart in a frantic effort to try and get Job to see truth in their false and useless arguments, namely, that Job's suffering is clear evidence of God's justice poured out upon him since this is what God does to all the wicked.

But Job strenuously objects and defends himself. Yet he finds himself in a place of abject helplessness in his desire to present his case before God and hear God's vindication of him. It is clear that no one else is going to come to Job's defense and Job is in a state of abandonment and loneliness beyond that which most humans could endure. He pled in 19:21, "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, For the hand of God has struck me." But he received no pity, no compassion, no understanding, no comfort and no assistance. So he cries out,

23:3-9:

3: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat! 4: "I would present *my* case before Him And fill my mouth with arguments. 5: "I would learn the

words *which* He would answer, And perceive what He would say to me. 6: "Would He contend with me by the greatness of *His* power? No, surely He would pay attention to me. 7: "There the upright would reason with Him; And I would be delivered forever from my Judge. 8: "Behold, I go forward but He is not *there*, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him; 9: When He acts on the left, I cannot behold *Him*; He turns on the right, I cannot see Him."

Even God has abandoned him. Now we see a shift in Job's thinking about why he is suffering in 10-12.

10: "But He knows the way I take; *When* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. 11: "My foot has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. 12: "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

Now Job has moved from complaining that God is unjust (an idea he has not been comfortable with) to the idea that God is testing or proving him. This is more palatable to Job and interestingly enough I hear this all the time from Christians who are going through some difficulty. But before you jump on this bandwagon, let's not exchange one ill thought out idea for another just yet. Remember, so far, Job has been lost and confused about all this as most would be in such pain and any answer that might relieve the suffering of mind, heart and spirit would be welcome, even if it has serious flaws.

For example, Morphine is designed to temporarily relieve pain but it isn't designed to take the place of good health any more than this popular concept is designed to take the place of truth. Still, the idea that God finds him worthy enough to undergo testing gives Job a glimmer of hope in a very dark situation even if this is a controversial concept. In times of pain any of us would grasp at straws. There is no question that God will produce gold out of the fire we endure, but he does not necessarily create the fire. We will examine this whole issue after the conclusion of the book. One of the popular ideas about Job is that it is about how God tests people, Job being the example. But this is misleading because it is not primarily Job that is being tested about his understanding and belief system about God, tragedy, and evil, it is whom? Us. The readers.

I have tried to underscore that God does not present the Bible to us as a book to read like we read other books. It is not intended for us to say in some detached way, as with other books we read, "Oh poor Job. He certainly had a terrible time of suffering back then. I guess I'll go and read the sports section now." The Scripture is actually intended to reach out and involve and affect the reader and cause him or her to be open to growth in understanding and wisdom through change and, as Paul put it, "the renewing of the

mind.” In other words the Scripture is a primary tool of the Holy Spirit’s work to develop wisdom, understanding, growth and maturity in our lives.

The Scripture says this of itself:

Psalm 19:7-10, 7: The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8: The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9: The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. 10: They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

II Timothy 3:16-17, 16: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness 17: so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

This is not a book examining the responses of Job and his friends to the horrors of life. It is a book intended to examine our responses and the bases for them and have them changed because our responses are as inadequate as Job’s friends.

But in our story, Job is finally moving in his thinking process. He has moved from thinking God is unjust - to considering that God is proving him and that he will be vindicated one day because he is innocent of any cause for the suffering he is enduring. This will demonstrate to his friends (who better watch out for themselves) that they are indeed the fools Job tells them they are.

Then, Job takes a different tact with the wicked and his view of God’s justice. Rather than stating again, in his own defense, that the wicked are those who prosper he turns and acknowledges that the ills of the world are largely the works of the wicked themselves, and that God does nothing about it and seems to care nothing about it. Again, Job is not alone in that perception, is he? He begins by asking in 24:1,

"Why are times not stored up by the Almighty, And why do those who know Him not see His days?"

This is a difficult question to understand. To state Job’s inquiry/complaint in an

understandable way would be to ask,

“How come God doesn’t appoint regular times when the stored up wickedness of men is judged by Him so that all who know Him can see it happen?” Another way to ask this is,

“Why doesn’t God hold court in front of those who know Him and apply justice to the wicked for the weight of their iniquities.”

Here’s what some of us might say in parallel to Job’s query. “If I were God, I would stop, or would have stopped the horror of this or that evil and not let it continue. I also would have stopped the instigator of this evil in his tracks.” Now can those of you who have ever thought this or a similar thought be courageous enough to admit it by raising your hand? Now, doesn’t this demonstrate to some degree that our thoughts and emotions are far different than God’s? Why is it that we think that what we think and feel is a reflection of what God thinks and feels? Yet it clearly isn’t. So we question the thoughts and feelings of God, rather than our own. Even about the wicked. For example, strictly hypothetical, we may hear of or witness a horrible act of evil one person inflicts upon another, such as a little child. Such a despicable and sickening act might make some of us angry enough to wish for the punishment, torture or death of the one performing such an evil. We assume that our emotions are the same as what God’s would be. But what if God was deeply saddened at the act of the wicked man because the wicked man, in bondage to his carnality, refuses to let the death of Christ and the mercy and love of God into his life. Had he done so, both he and the child would have been spared. Perhaps our thoughts, ways and emotions do not reflect God’s as much as we assume they might.

Now, let’s delve deeper and have a little fun doing so. If you know the answer to Job’s question/lament, that is “Why doesn’t or hasn’t God brought stoppage or judgment to the continued wicked and evil deeds of men?” - a clearly Biblical grounded answer that is - then you are coming to an understanding of the heart of the issues we are discussing and will discuss. Now, the first part of the answer has to deal with Job’s assertion that God doesn’t do this. Is Job correct? Or is he incorrect? The second part of the answer must deal with how you answer that issue and the why of your answer.

Depending on your conclusions the rest of your argument will go in one of two ways. Only in one of those two ways will you find God’s wisdom and truth. If you choose the other way, it will not be true no matter how much you insist on it and believe it to be true - as do Job’s friends. You will join their company. So have fun with that. It will be a grand journey. But I will give you a hint. Job’s reason why he feels God does not hold court against the wicked regularly is incorrect. See if you can figure out the “why” of

that.

So, the rest of chapter 24 is Job's description of the works of the wicked as his answer to his lament that God doesn't hold court for the wicked in front of those who know Him. (You must read this for yourself. Please do.) His point is that the wicked go about their evil deeds with impunity. In this he tries to underscore or illustrate that God doesn't care about the destructive deeds of the wicked and thus, by this hypothesis, then God doesn't care about the pain of the righteous either.

He is not alone in this quandary. What then are the true and real answers to this common human quandary? Do we wish to learn? Then please remain at least open to the idea that we may be lacking in the understanding, words and actions that will hopefully elevate above those of Job's friends and allow us to bring real truth and comfort to those who suffer. We, therefore must continue.

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **CHAPTERS TWENTY FOUR - TWENTY EIGHT** **CONDENSED SUMMARY**

We have followed Job as he has moved in his thinking process about why he has come to suffer so. While his three companions have insisted that Job is suffering as a result of God's inflicting justice upon his unrighteousness, Job has consistently affirmed his righteousness and rejected the counsel of his companions. Once confused about whether God is truly just or not as he suffers for no cause, Job has moved from thinking that God may be unjust to thinking God might have found him worthy of being tested so that he will one day be vindicated and his friends shown to be the fools they are.

Their discussion, as you will recall, had bogged down over how the wicked are treated by God. Job's companions came to the absurd conclusion that the wicked never prosper and if they do it is short lived and essentially they simply wail in pain all their days. They take this stand, of course, because they must prove that Job is wicked based on his suffering, a suffering that only God inflicts would inflict wicked. So Job must be wicked.

In his defense, and also pushing the limits of absurdity, Job has repeatedly stated that the wicked not only prosper, but they and their children live in luxury and ease all their days until they die. Only then will they be judged for their evil acts and lack of trust in God.

Now, Job has taken a different tact with the wicked and with his view of God's justice. Rather than stating again, in his own defense, that the wicked are those who prosper he turns and acknowledges that the ills of the world are largely the works of the wicked themselves, and that God does nothing about it and seems to care nothing about it. Again, Job is not alone in that perception, and again he is partially correct. And he wonders why God doesn't bring down judgment upon them in front of those who know Him. Remember he asked in 24:1,

"Why are times not stored up by the Almighty, And why do those who know Him not see His days?" In other words, "Why doesn't God hold court in front of those who know Him and apply justice to the wicked for the weight of their iniquities."

Job's ensuing argument about "why" is incorrect because he concludes that God neither cares about the wicked deeds of evil against the innocent nor about the plight of the innocent. A sample of Job's thoughts about the freedom of the wicked to plunder the world with impunity are found in 24:2-4; 10-15; 24-25.

2-4,

2: "Some remove the landmarks; They seize and devour flocks. 3: "They drive away the donkeys of the orphans; They take the widow's ox for a pledge. 4: "They push the needy aside from the road; The poor of the land are made to hide themselves altogether."

10-15,

10: "They cause *the poor* to go about naked without clothing, And they take away the sheaves from the hungry. 11: "Within the walls they produce oil; They tread wine presses but thirst. 12: "From the city men groan, And the souls of the wounded cry out; Yet God does not pay attention to folly. 13: "Others have been with those who rebel against the light; They do not want to know its ways Nor abide in its paths. 14: "The murderer arises at dawn; He kills the poor and the needy, And at night he is as a thief. 15: "The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, Saying, 'No eye will see me.' And he disguises his face.

24-25,

24: "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. 25: "Now if it is not so, who can prove me a liar, And make my speech worthless?"

In response, Bildad, in his final speech has little to say. He concludes with a simple and brief statement and falls to defeat. But one of the things that Job is stating is that indeed it is the wicked that bring pain upon the innocent. Even in his own case, the Sabeans, and the Chaldeans were the ones who inflicted much of the pain upon Job and his family.

Job 25:1-6,

1: Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, 2: "Dominion and awe belong to Him Who establishes peace in His heights. 3: "Is there any number to His troops? And upon whom does His light not rise? 4: "How then can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? 5: "If even the moon has no brightness And the stars are not pure in His sight, 6: How much less man, *that* maggot, And the son of man, *that* worm!"

Bildad asserts that no man can be righteous before God. I wonder why it didn't cross his mind why he and his companions have not suffered like Job. Hmmm.

The next 6 chapters comprise Job's final soliloquy and at the end of it Zophar doesn't even attempt a reply. We are not going to read or study the entirety of Job's final appeal, but there is a lot to glean as some of what he says can't be skipped over.

First he excoriates his friends for their ineptitude and empty words and does it with bitter sarcasm.

Job 26:1-3,

1: Then Job responded, 2: "What a help you are to the weak! How you have saved the arm without strength! 3: "What counsel you have given to *one* without wisdom! What helpful insight you have abundantly provided!"

Job then asserts his innocence and righteousness and assumes it is God who has embittered his soul. It is a little too much as we know that no man is righteous in himself. In our case it is because God has declared us righteous due to our casting our sinful selves upon Jesus in faith and trust because of our great unrighteousness. Though Job has lived an exemplary life, and has not done so for the purpose of gaining reward, prosperity or blessing from God, still, he gives all the credit to himself and it is only God who declares him to be righteous. Job doesn't know this however.

Job 27:1-6,

1: Then Job continued his discourse and said, 2: "As God lives, who has taken away my right, And the Almighty, who has embittered my soul, 3: For as long as life is in me, And the breath of God is in my nostrils, 4: My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, Nor will my tongue mutter deceit. 5: "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."

\*His three companions

There is little that is more disturbing than an individual touting his own righteousness. I remember a discussion in a deacons meeting, the content of which I don't remember. However the chairman of the deacons was somehow prompted to state, while pointing to his mouth, "Not a drop of liquor has ever crossed these lips." I guess that made him even more righteous than Jesus, but I heard it with my own ears. Another problem is of course, the statement of those unsaved who believe that their own goodness is sufficient to qualify them for heaven and they don't need Jesus." To the ears of Job's friends, they are hearing Job state things like this and are disturbed about it. The difference is that God

has said that Job is indeed righteous and blameless and so the arguments of his friends are based on a wrong premise. Note 32:1 for a moment. “Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.”

In the rest of chapter 27, Job changes his tune and describes the life and fate of the wicked man in terms strikingly like those of his own circumstances. In doing so Job even uses similar arguments of his three companions against him to illustrate his own righteousness.

Job 27:13-23,

13: "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, And the inheritance *which* tyrants receive from the Almighty. 14: "Though his sons are many, they are destined for the sword; And his descendants will not be satisfied with bread. 15: "His survivors will be buried because of the plague, And their widows will not be able to weep. 16: "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. 18: "He has built his house like the spider's web, Or as a hut *which* the watchman has made. 19: "He lies down rich, but never again; He opens his eyes, and it is no longer. 20: "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. 23: "*Men* will clap their hands at him And will hiss him from his place.”

This sounds a lot like what happened to Job, and his friends may be sitting there shaking their heads because they can't believe that Job is describing the wicked and their fate and then Job, suffering the same things can't see that this proves himself wicked by his own words. No wonder they have no more to say as to them, it and Job is a lost cause.

Now, in chapter 28, Job gives an eloquent description of wisdom. Noting that wisdom cannot be found in the earth like gold, silver, or precious stones, and is far more precious than any of earth's treasures.

12-15,

12: "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? 13: "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.' 15: "Pure gold cannot be given in exchange for it, Nor can silver be weighed as its price.”

20-21,

20: "Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding?

21: "Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living And concealed from the birds of the sky."

And,

28: "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

The phrase, "fear of the Lord" is a common one in the scripture. It is frequently interpreted as "reverence" for God or "submission and obedience to God" and that is certainly the goal of the statement. But the actual word in the Hebrew is **יִרְאָה**

("Yir-rah") from the root **יָרָא** ("Yaw-rey") meaning, "to be in fear of, terrified of, or in total awe of". The idea is not to be afraid of God Himself in the strict sense. The point is to fear the consequences of disobeying and rejecting God. For the Jew, disobeying God's Law especially the first through third commandments, would come to mind. So when we are told that the "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of wisdom, it is telling us that the benefits and consequences of submitting to God and complying with his will are more precious than gold, silver or precious stones. It also emphasizes the reverse, that turning away from evil is tantamount to having "the fear of the Lord".

Paul picks up on this in I Corinthians 3:12-14,

12: "Now if any man builds on the foundation (of Christ) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13: each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14: If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15: If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

Peter says this,

"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; 18: knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of

life inherited from your forefathers, 19: but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.” I Peter 1:17-19

Donna and I once had a family in our little church, a man, his wife and two little daughters. They professed faith in the Lord. But the man was never satisfied with the income – the silver and gold he was producing - and wanted more. He worked two low paying jobs and was dissatisfied. One of those jobs was as a bouncer in a local sports bar. In the course of this position he was approached and offered a hundred thousand dollars if he would kill a person in a contract hit on the east coast. The man took the deal. He flew to the east coast and waited until the wife was gone before approaching the door of their house. When the target opened the door, this man shot him in the forehead. To his dismay, a young boy was standing behind his dad when this occurred and when the dad fell to the floor the boy just stood there looking at his dad’s killer. In a moment the killer realized there was a witness and shot and killed the little boy also. Though he had tried to create an alibi, it was just a matter of a few weeks until he was arrested. Awaiting trial at county jail, he tried to convince me and his family of his innocence, but the evidence was overwhelming and the alibi was shredded. He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. We spent several years trying to help his wife and children come to some sort of normality. This man thought that gold and silver were worth more than the fear of the Lord, but in this turning away from the path of wisdom he reaped its consequences.

Psalm 84:10 says in part, “I would rather stand at the threshold (or be a doorkeeper KJV) of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Psalms is of course, one of those pesky wisdom books.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTER TWENTY NINE CONDENSED SUMMARY

Chuck Swindoll, after receiving a standing ovation at a conference where he would address the crowd said, “The only other standing ovation I have ever received was at church when I finally finished my exposition on the Book of Job.”

I expect you are hoping it will all end soon as well. We are getting close. So let’s turn to chapter 29. In his longest and final speech, Job has stated that the wicked will indeed suffer the justice of God and he, though seemingly suffering the judgment of the wicked will, unlike them, be vindicated because he has done nothing to deserve his circumstances and has lived an obedient and righteous life before the Lord.

In chapter 29 he gives a specific account of his blessed life because he loved the righteousness of God and loved to live likewise. His companions have stated that his life was not a righteous one, but God agrees with Job that it indeed was. And so Job longs for those days once again. Watch how Job makes a point how God was with him and the evidence of that was the prosperity and respect he enjoyed.

29:1-25,

1: And Job again took up his discourse and said, 2: "Oh that I were as in months gone by, As in the days when God watched over me; 3: When His lamp shone over my head, *And* by His light I walked through darkness; 4: As I was in the prime of my days, When the friendship of God *was* over my tent; 5: When the Almighty was yet with me, *And* my children were around me; 6: When my steps were bathed in butter, *And* the rock poured out for me streams of oil! 7: "When I went out to the gate of the city, When I took my seat in the square, 8: The young men saw me and hid themselves, *And* the old men arose *and* stood. 9: "The princes stopped talking *And* put *their* hands on their mouths; 10: The voice of the nobles was hushed, *And* their tongue stuck to their palate. 11: "For when the ear heard, it called me blessed, *And* when the eye saw, it gave witness of me, 12: Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, *And* the orphan who had no helper. 13: "The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me, *And* I made the widow's heart sing for joy. 14: "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban. 15: "I was eyes to the blind *And* feet to the lame. 16: "I was a father to the needy, *And* I investigated the case which I

did not know. 17: "I broke the jaws of the wicked And snatched the prey from his teeth. 18: "Then I thought, 'I shall die in my nest, And I shall multiply *my* days as the sand. 19: 'My root is spread out to the waters, And dew lies all night on my branch. 20: 'My glory is *ever* new with me, And my bow is renewed in my hand.' 21: "To me they listened and waited, And kept silent for my counsel. 22: "After my words they did not speak again, And my speech dropped on them. 23: "They waited for me as for the rain, And opened their mouth as for the spring rain. 24: "I smiled on them when they did not believe, And the light of my face they did not cast down. 25: "I chose a way for them and sat as chief, And dwelt as a king among the troops, As one who comforted the mourners."

Job was considered a wise judge in the gates of his city. He was respected and admired. Then disaster struck him, his possessions and his family. It appears that most if not all of the citizens of the land had agreed with Job's friends, that all this occurred because Job was actually a wicked man, and therefore a hypocrite and a fraud. In disgust, they abhorred him.

Let's try together to put finality to this absurd idea, because it is still held by millions of believers around the world. Perhaps some of us we can move from this ill thought out belief to the truth.

Let's ask a few rhetorical questions. Do not feel compelled to answer except in your own mind.

Did Job suffer because, as his friends were convinced, he was more wicked and sinful than others? Were those who died on 9/11/01 more sinful than those who survived? Were those who suffered death and loss from Hurricanes Katrina and Ike more sinful than those who escaped? Do the disasters that fall upon the US and other countries occur because of their greater wickedness and sinfulness as compared to other nations where these things did not occur? Were the millions of Jews and Christians murdered under the evil hand of the Third Reich more wicked than those who survived? And finally, if you said no, then how is it that it is often proclaimed that God brought these disasters upon people because of their wickedness? Was it to somehow judge them and bring them to repentance from their wicked sins? Or can these events actually be used to bring some people to repentance?

If you are not sure, then let's have Jesus put a cap on the issue for us and on the arguments of Job's three friends and on all those who hold such ideas.

Luke 13:1-5,

1: "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. 2: And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered this *fate*? 3: "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4: "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? 5: "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

The Jews generally held the view that personal tragedy reveals that God wrought justice on these because they were more sinful and wicked needed to repent or else they would find themselves on the judgment end of the spectrum. Elihu, when we get to his comments, will agree that these events are do not occur because of the sinfulness of people whether wealthy or poor, wicked or righteous. (Job 34:16-20)

So, based on what Jesus says, do the tragedies which affect peoples or nations do so because they are more wicked and sinful than others? Remember, it was not Bob, but Jesus who said "No!" Job agrees wholeheartedly doesn't he? Now Job, having professed his devotion to God and to God's people had to endure this ingrained theological absurdity as it was inflicted upon himself.

30:1, "But now those younger than I mock me, Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock. "

Here, Job is speaking of the dregs of society whom he would not even put in with his unclean dogs who now mock him. He describes their worthlessness and then says in 30:8-10,

Job 30:8,

8: "Fools, even those without a name, They were scourged from the land. 9: "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."

We now bring before you an unavoidable picture that has been waiting in the wings all this time and is now presented before us. This is precious.

The story of Job, in a great many ways, is a picture of our Savior Jesus in His innocence, suffering, humiliation, suffering those who mocked him in an almost identical manner as

Jesus was mocked - taunted, criticized by the religious wise men of His day and by the public at large.

So, considering the topic we have discussed today and perhaps even lingering doubts as I have presented it; if indeed catastrophe is evidence of God illustrating who is more wicked and judging them for it so whoever is left will repent, then what about how Jesus suffered, was mocked by those who felt He was getting what He deserved, was beaten, suffered unimaginable, and tortured on a Roman cross until He died an agonizing death. Did this happen because He was so wicked and sinful? Of course not.

If we learn nothing else from the book of Job it has to be at least that terrible affliction happens even to the most devoted and righteous but also that our response, even to the most wicked and evil who also suffer must be that of compassion, truth and of the Good News of the gospel, we are commanded to share, that God knows, understands, loves and has provided a way of hope in His Son Jesus Christ, if they will indeed repent, turn from their sinful ways and cast themselves upon His mercy. We are not to rejoice when anyone suffers and dies, even those we consider our enemies and the most heinous of peoples. Jesus commended us to love even our enemies and pray for them that persecute us. He said this because the people believed that they were to hate their enemies, but he said the opposite.

For example, in contrast to wishing destruction on those who rejected Jesus, or rejoicing when they were hurt or suffered or died, Jesus not only forgave His crucifiers but earlier cried out to Jerusalem and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling." (Matthew 23:37) He still cries out to the world the same message. He desires to enfold the lost into His arms, under His wings as it were. Many are unwilling as we know, but you and I were not. Time was given to us and now, we are sheltered in His wings.

Jesus doesn't perversely rejoice when someone suffers pain and death as if they deserved it. He weeps because the time is gone in which they had opportunity to turn in repentance and sorrow to the One who loves them. He wishes that all would come and find rest for their souls in Him.

Even for the wicked, like Jerusalem who killed the prophets and even Him, He is in great sorrow for their pain and death. So we should be also.

**THE BOOK OF JOB**  
**CHAPTERS THIRTY - THIRTY ONE**  
**CONDENSED SUMMARY**

30:12-13

We left Job in deep pain. In his mind, not only has God afflicted Him without cause, but Also because now, the rabble are mocking and looting his life and his reputation. He laments about this saying,

12: "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."

Then Job expresses the heart's cry of those who have done good but suffered greatly without understanding why.

Job 30:25-26,

25: "Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy? 26: "When I expected good, then evil came; When I waited for light, then darkness came."

Can we identify with Job? Have we ever worked hard so that what we hoped for in this world would come to pass only to have our hopes come crashing down time after time? If you asked our son Mike, he would say, yeah, pretty much all the time. He works so hard to get ahead and just at the time he is about to get ahead, something caves in on him. He battles cynicism versus hope most of the time as far as his desire to succeed in his vocation goes. Some of us who have seen our retirement go into the dumpster recently may have these feelings.

Job's hopes were similar. He looked to a bright future and was assured that God would bless him all his days because he was faithful to God and served him in a devoted, unselfish way and then the roof fell in. Of course, Job's assumptions about the rewards of his life in this world were completely wrong, but they were commonly held by the ancients of his day and still are by many in the world. Even a great many Christians across this land are being convinced that their righteous living not only makes them immune to pain and suffering but will prosper them and making them healthy, wealthy

and wise. The only ones becoming wealthy are of course the preachers who teach this nonsense while convincing untold millions that if they send in their tithes and offerings to them that God will in turn prosper and protect them from the ills of this world.

May I simply say that teaching of this sort is not only a truck load of pasture pies, but borders on heathenism and Satanism. What I mean by this is that this thinking is way too close to the idea that if you burn your first born on the altar and the gods will pour out their blessing upon you and your crops.

Allow me to repeat a principle or “rule of thumb” I have stated many times. Faith is not exhibited as, “We initiate some action, request, claim or work and God responds,” but rather that, “God initiates His word and work and we respond and obey Him.”

Job’s final appeal is found in chapter 31. He argues that if he has indeed committed acts of wickedness then he can live with his punishment. But he has not done so. And by the way, the interesting thing here is, that in his listing of what he has done and not done in his desire to live in righteous obedience to God, he puts us to shame. We need to read what Job - and in actuality what God - is saying about how he lived his life. Listen carefully, and though Job is wondering about how God could inflict this upon him in light of the way he has devoted his life to godliness, listen to his life of godliness. How do we stack up?

31:5-14,

5: "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. 7: "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. 9: "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. 13: "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?"

In other words, if he had acted in any terrible way he could understand the justice of God upon him and would have no defense. However, let us be reminded that in spite of what Job and his companions say, God neither acts in this manner for any reason man can come up with, nor does He have to answer to any man for what happens in this world.

We will get into this in more depth as we study God's gracious answer to Job, an answer He is not obligated to give but gives for our sake as well as for Job's. But Job continues with a painful cry, reflective of the cry of the world and we need to hear him just so we can understand him and weep with him.

By the way, while we were in Riverside Greg Laurie, expressed his pain over the loss of his son Christopher, thirty-two years of age, in July of this year in a tragic auto accident also leaving a pregnant wife and a little daughter. In talking about this, he told the audience about his challenging and painful upbringing, but told us that the loss of his son was the most painful and difficult time in his entire life. Then he took time to reflect on what people said to him about his loss. He listed some of those things one should never say – however well intentioned - to a bereaving and grieving person. Among them were, “How are you doing”? Another was, “Don't cry or be sad.” Often followed by some explanation such as, “The Lord did this ... and add some inane suggestion. This is the worst thing anyone can say and he noted, “Please don't go there.” Another is, “I know what you are going through.” Someone intending to demonstrate their empathy and understanding said this and added, “I lost my grandmother a few months ago.” “Well grandmothers are not expected to live forever”, he said, “But to lose one's own son in the prime of his life when you expect that he will be there to receive the baton when you pass is not the same.” Another claiming they knew what he was going through adding that they had just lost their dog. Another said, “What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger.” Another said, “God picks the best flowers first”. And so on. But he commented on Job's friends. He said that at the beginning Job's friends had it right. They wept with and for Job and said nothing. This is in accordance with God's counsel through the Apostle Paul who said, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” But Job's friends made the mistake of opening their mouths.

For a lengthy time now, I have tried to help us come to a depth of understanding and develop a wisdom about these tragedies using the Book of Job as our guide so we won't open our mouths and bring more grief and misunderstanding about God to the ears of a lost and dying world, or even to our own families. We received a letter this past Wednesday, the day before thanksgiving from a friend named Nancy in Washington State. Let me read it.

“Mom called about a half an hour ago. She had just gotten off the phone with Kathy who was sobbing in a store.” (Kathy is Nancy's sister and Kourtney is Kathy's daughter.) She goes on. “Kathy and Kourtney had just come from the doctor who told them Kourtney's baby has died. We have no idea how this happened but they will be inducing next Monday. Other than that, it's all the information I have. I will call Kathy later this

evening – I think they need some time to process all of this. Kourtney only had about two weeks to go to her due date.” And then Nancy writes,

“I know God has a plan in mind and that it’s all for our good. Still hard to understand.”

Our friend is a Pastor’s daughter. Yet in her over 60 years as a Christian, she still struggles with things like this. Like Job, the question “why” is asked and notice that God is in the context.

So let us weep with Nancy, Kathy, Kourtney and those in terrible pain. But let us be careful about what we offer as words of consolation. So also we weep with Job. We understand and hurt with him as he wonders still, what he did to deserve all of this pain. Yet when we view his life and compare it with ours we may find cause to weep again. So Job cries out in hope God or anyone is listening,

31:16-22,

16: "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 19: 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, 21: 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.”

He could understand if God were to inflict such pain upon him if he were indeed wicked and withheld help to the poor and needy. But he didn’t. He is stuck on the idea that people get what they deserve in this world. And so he says in confusion and fear,

23: "For calamity from God is a terror to me, And because of His majesty I can do nothing.

Job continues in the same quandary for the rest of the chapter and concludes with,

35: "Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature; Let the Almighty answer me! 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. 37: "I would declare to Him the number of my steps; Like a prince I would approach Him. 38: "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." The words of Job are ended.

What Job thinks he has deserved is a far cry from what he has received. Even Christians today, are still hung up on all this. In contrast, I can remember when I felt so alone and believed God had abandoned me. I cried out how sorry I was for the things I had done, said or thought. And I cried out for God to please allow me to feel that He still loved me...to give me a spiritual hug, anything to assure me I was not lost. And I received...nothing. Unlike Job, I could recount my unrighteousness much easier than my righteousness. And remember, God has said that our righteousness is like a filthy rag - a dirty garment and unclean to him. (Isaiah 64:6)

For me I could understand God's displeasure with me. And as I look at the accurate description of Job's righteous life, I still stand in awe that I found that God did indeed still love me. It was years before God finally revealed to me that He loved me, not because of my righteousness but in spite of my unrighteousness. And God loved Job. Worldly circumstances do not demonstrate God's great love for us, it is the cross of Jesus that does this.

Romans 5:6-8 makes this clear. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTERS THIRTY TWO - THIRTY FOUR CONDENSED SUMMARY

#### **Job 32 Job has completed his lament in 31:40**

32:1-5,

1: "Then these three men ceased answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. 2: 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. 3: And his anger burned against his three friends because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job. 4: Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job because they were years older than he. 5: And when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men his anger burned."

Elihu, (whose name means "My God is the Lord") has been sitting and listening for most of the time poor Job and his three friends have been arguing over why God inflicted all this upon Job. Elihu apparently arrived shortly after the other three men and sat down and said nothing until this point. Someone asked me how long these speeches had actually gone on. This is impossible to say, as in poetry, and especially in wisdom literature, we are forced to set aside questions about many things that might interest us such as where, when, how, who and, what. The drama barely deals with these things because they are unimportant to the more important question that is asked which is "why"?

The goal is to help the reader develop and grow in wisdom and understanding not examine the setting and characters as if the book is something to examine in a Petri dish. We have the tendency to do this. But when we do, it keeps the flow of God's word out of our blood stream in which it belongs. We need to take it out of the Petri dish and inject it into our system, as God desires us to do. It is one thing to ponder wisdom, and another to become wise.

But, I digress. We are watching the drama before us. Having patiently waited for these four men to verbally exhaust themselves, and each other, Elihu finally speaks up.

32:6-12,

6: "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. 8: "But it is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. 9: "The abundant *in years* may not be wise, Nor may elders understand justice. 10: "So I say, 'Listen to me, I too will tell what I think.' 11: "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."

So after his insult and chiding of the three friends we can now hear what this young wise man has to say. But let's move to chapter 33, as we will not study all the words of Elihu, but select the most important themes he presents. Much of what he says is repeating what the other men have said and refuting it. We don't need to do this all again except in a few places so we can understand Elihu's thoughts in their proper context. So, after noting how he had listened to the entirety of what the four men had to say and noting he was unhappy with it all, Elihu speaks to Job:

33:1-7,

1: "However now, Job, please hear my speech, And listen to all my words. 2: "Behold now, I open my mouth, My tongue in my mouth speaks. 3: "My words are *from* the uprightness of my heart, And my lips speak knowledge sincerely. 4: "The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life. 5: "Refute me if you can; Array yourselves before me, take your stand. 6: "Behold, I belong to God like you; I too have been formed out of the clay. 7: "Behold, no fear of me should terrify you, Nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you."

Elihu now proceeds to accurately summarize Job's complaint,

33:8-11,

8: "Surely you have spoken in my hearing, And I have heard the sound of *your* words: (quoting Job now) 9 'I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent and there is no guilt in me.'<sup>9</sup> 10: 'Behold, He invents pretexts against me; He counts me as His enemy.'<sup>10</sup> 11: 'He puts my feet in the stocks; He watches all my paths.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See: 9:20, 9:30-31, 10:15-17

<sup>10</sup> See: 13:24, 19:11, 30:21, 31:35

<sup>11</sup> See: 13:27

And then Elihu says to Job,

12: "Behold, let me tell you, you are not right in this, For God is greater than man. 13: "Why do you complain against Him That He does not give an account of all His doings?"

Elihu goes on to note that God does speak in unseen and unheard ways to warn man and keep him from the way of pride, but that man's life, especially in his weakness brings man to dependence upon God rather than upon himself. Notice 19-22:

19: "Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, And with unceasing complaint in his bones; 20: 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. 22: "Then his soul draws near to the pit, And his life to those who bring death."

Elihu does not hint that it is God who brings this condition upon man, but will use man's frailties to bring man to Himself to discover that God is truly righteous. Verses 28-33:

28: 'He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit, And my life shall see the light.' 29: "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. 31: "Pay attention, O Job, listen to me; Keep silent, and let me speak. 32: "*Then* if you have anything to say, answer me; Speak, for I desire to justify you. 33: "If not, listen to me; Keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom."

Elihu now moves to correct Job by stating that God neither employs injustice nor wickedness in His dealings with men (34:10). 10: "Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to do wrong." This is a key issue.

Canadian Neil Peart (pee-ert) was the award winning drummer for the rock band RUSH for over thirty years. He is their lyricist, and the songs RUSH sing often have to do with social issues. Peart has written several books about his personal travels in the world. In his 1996 publication entitled "The Masked Rider, Cycling in West Africa", he, and four companions are bicycling through Cameroon. They have traveled through some stark, poverty ridden villages and have now stopped at a Catholic monastery for the night. At Vespers, listening to nuns gently sing hymns to God, he is caught up in thoughts about God. He is not a believer and struggles with the idea of a loving God in relation to human suffering. Here is what he writes,

“The father of a friend of mine came to Canada from Eastern Europe after World War II, accompanied by hope, a multi-syllabic name, and a young bride. Both of them had been brought up as Eastern Orthodox Catholics, and carried their beliefs with them to a new country. His wife was stricken by disease soon after their arrival, and died, leaving my friend’s father wretched at this meaningless pain and loss, and he rejected his religion forever. ‘A God who could do this to me is not my God.’”

Peart continues,

“My brother Danny feels that the greatest sadness in life is to lose a beloved mate; but he has no children. It seems to me that the deepest, most cruel sorrow must be a mother losing a child. No bonds can be tighter, or more painfully broken. As a boy I once saw a photograph of a Vietnamese mother holding her dead baby and wailing. This seemed to represent the greatest of human suffering, and I have never forgotten that image. And yet all the platitudes that are trotted out, “that’s the way God planned it;” “God has called her to Him;” “she has found a better life.” How does a mother lose her innocent child, and still keep her faith in such a cruel deity? And yet they do.”

Neal Peart was 57 years old when I quoted him and an intelligent and talented man. He has asked the same question people, whether believers or non believers, have asked before and after the days of Job. “How can people have faith in such a God?”

Job’s friends cannot make the pronouncement that many make, “God is cruel”. So they resorted to attacking Job. Elihu neither attacks Job nor states that God is cruel and unjust – as Job has intimated. Neither does he engage in the insipid platitudes and distorted views of God and life so many of us resort to in times of suffering, discouragement and pain. Elihu continues, 10-13,

10: "Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to do wrong. 11: "For He pays a man according to his work, And makes him find it according to his way. 12: "Surely, God will not act wickedly, And the Almighty will not pervert justice. 13: "Who gave Him authority over the earth? And who has laid *on Him* the whole world?

First, it is an ignorant thing to conclude that God acts in any wicked way at all or is unjust in His dealings with men. So, if we agree with Elihu, and with the rest of Scripture we have reviewed recently, let’s put away the insipid platitude that even suggests or hints at that, “God did, or even allowed or permitted this awful thing for some higher or secret

divine purpose.” We will discuss this again because so many are bogged down in this concept - and though we have covered 34 chapters in this divinely inspired book, it is not enough to stave off this inaccurate thinking. Those who still think that God either produces evil, or allows it, or fails to prevent it thus allowing evil, reflect neither truth nor Biblical teaching, and actually unknowingly come close to espousing the doctrine of demons. The last thing, I would hope in how, we want our remarks to be understood is Neal’s thought, “How can you worship such a cruel God”.

Note verse 11. Man is ultimately responsible for his works and deeds whether they be good or evil and God will response in a commensurate manner. Therefore both Job and his friends are wrong. So Elihu begins to lay the foundation that man is the cause of evil in the world, a truth to which Job had alluded but couldn’t reconcile this with God’s not preventing it. Note 12 and 13. In other words, there is no higher One than God who tells Him what to do. Neither Job nor his companions are in any position to either demand anything of God or even to attempt to explain how God’s justice is applied and to whom.

14: "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.

16: "But if *you have* understanding, hear this; Listen to the sound of my words. 17: "Shall one who hates justice rule? And will you condemn the righteous mighty One, 18: 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?"

Verse 17 is a rhetorical question noting that if God hated justice, how could He rule? God’s sovereignty carries with it the idea of righteousness and by extrapolation, justice. Verse 18 demonstrates that even if a person holds a respected position and is wealthy, their true inner character is not hidden from God. People, as in our recent election, may hail someone as the savior of the nation, even as a “messiah”, but to place one’s trust and faith in any man is the act of a fool, as every Christian should know.

Now let’s look at verse 19. So, God shows no partiality to anyone. Their fame or position is not important to God. For example, God does not favor the Cardinals over the Rams today. I always sort of cringe when I see a player point upward or cross himself after making a touchdown, as if he were praising God for helping him score. I also notice that when this same player is thrown for a ten yard loss under a pile of 300 pound defensive linemen, there is no pointing up of rejoicing when he crawls to his feet. His job is to hit that same crushing defensive line the next time he gets the ball. This is commendable, getting up after being knocked down, especially if you are just a regular person like you or me. But God isn’t impressed by your effort, but only why you made

the effort. Perhaps God would be less interested in the touchdown than in the time spent loving one's family and loving God. Just a thought. Why do I say this? Well, verses 20-22 might give us a hint:

20: "In a moment they die, and at midnight People are shaken and pass away, And the mighty are taken away without a hand. 21: "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."

Elihu closes this chapter with his own judgment on Job, not for the same reasons the three others have asserted, namely that Job is wicked and God has judged him for it, but that Job has spoken against God

34: "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. 36: '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.'"

Now, has Elihu himself crossed the line into foolishness?

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTERS THIRTY FIVE - THIRTY SEVEN CONDENSED SUMMARY

I write this at the season of the battle – the atheists versus Christmas is upon us. The news reports that Washington State is in the middle of this mess right now. So as Christmas displays are set up around the country the atheists (supported by the ACLU of course) are responding with their tired “God doesn’t exist” signs and placards set up next to nativity scenes and the such. Their message is that anyone who believes in this Christmas foolishness, let alone God, is a moron and so on.

Well let me say first, I love this debate. While others wring their hands, all up in arms over the atheistic effort, (and good for them, by the way), I sort of rejoice in all of it *and here’s why*. Primarily, it’s because I’m a completely weird person. I say this for those who were already questioning my sanity, patriotism or Christianity. But actually it is cool because, if you ever happen to notice, none of these atheistic efforts ever appear in protest to Muslim Holidays, (I mean after all they believe in God) or for that matter Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, American Indian, Taoist or any other religious holidays of people who believe in a Supreme Being. Why Christmas! Isn’t this great that atheists are only threatened by Jesus and by no one else? I wonder if even one atheist has ever noticed this.

Secondly, every atheist I have ever met or heard speak is smugly arrogant in considering him or herself far more intelligent than others who do believe in God. And yet, the single requirement to be an atheist is simple...you have to be a complete and total drooling idiot. Not only because the Bible makes the same claim about atheists in Psalm 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”, but because to be an atheist, you have to claim to know everything there is to know in all of human history past present and future, and have experienced everything every human has ever experienced or will experience in order to conclude there is no God. And since they don’t know everything and haven’t experienced everything, they cannot dismiss God coming to the realization that it is possible He could exist outside of their own personal knowledge or experience. So, defying common sense, logic and the available and sufficient evidence that God does exist, atheists, by their very claim demonstrate their ignorance. In short, by saying one is an atheist is the same as claiming, “Duh, yeah, I am a drooling moronic and ignorant idiot.” Even Carl Sagan, as well as Stephen Hawking, in their efforts to deny God’s existence, laid down the foundation for not only the possibility of God’s existence, but the probability of God’s existence in their own arguments. They refused to

admit it of course, but there it stands.

Now, on the other hand, our study in Job relates to a key reason why people are atheists. One central argument for their stand is found in the question, “How can an omnipotent, omniscient and loving God who is good allow or permit the horrors of evil and catastrophes in a pain filled world and do nothing to stop them?”

And they get few answers from the believing community and most of the one’s they get are simply the same one’s we have been trying to discard for nearly five months now. So they respond with “That’s why I don’t believe in God”. “A God like that couldn’t exist and your argument that He does is moronic and ludicrous,” they assert. So our study becomes even more germane, and, as you might have ascertained, has moved into the realm of apologetics. Even Elihu rejects Job’s contention that God is unjust, though Job does not reject God. He is just lost and confused as he sees the human condition and wonders where God is in all of it.

So, as Elihu closed chapter 34 with his own judgment on Job, not for the same reasons the three others have asserted, but because Job has spoken against God. Job has presented any arguments similar to those by which many people reject belief in God, namely that, God is unjust, doesn’t care about the poor and needy, afflicts the innocent and let’s the wicked get away with murder, and so on. Job has nearly demanded that God give an account of Himself. To which Elihu responded,

34:35-40

35: 'Job speaks without knowledge, And his words are without wisdom. 36: '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.'"

But we notice that Elihu seems, like the other three, to ignore Job’s terrible pain and horrendous suffering as well as Job’s commitment to God even though he has spoken rashly at times out of his torment. Elihu has done nothing to render aid to Job, or bind up his wounds or even give him a drink of cool water. But Elihu does realize that catastrophe can happen to anyone at any time regardless of their social standing or religious devotion. Remember, Job’s three friends on the other hand refuse to consider that Job’s sufferings reflect that God has acted unjustly and have under necessity concluded that Job’s suffering is due to his own hidden wickedness.

Elihu rightly rejects all of this postulating and posturing, as well as Job’s lamenting about God. (35:1-3)

35:1-3,

1: Then Elihu continued and said, 2: "Do you think this is according to justice? Do you say, 'My righteousness is more than God's'? 3: "For you say, 'What advantage will it be to You? What profit will I have, more than if I had sinned?'

Elihu asks a terrific question here because of its implications. Let's clarify his point.

First, verse one goes with the following question, not with the previous statement. It has several possible translations as well. Elihu's question boils down to this as he asks Job, "Do you believe that justice can be determined when you state on the one hand, 'I have a greater sense of justice than God does', and on the other, 'after all, what difference does it make to Him whether I live righteously or sinfully?'"

That's the gist of it! And it is a wonderful point to consider. For example, one day back in the late sixties when I was in seminary, my grandfather and I had a conversation. My grandfather, though the son of a Presbyterian minister, held a view somewhere between an agnostic and an atheist. This came about due to the untimely death of his mother whom he adored, leaving him a motherless child. So as we were discussing the love of God demonstrated in His son Jesus, he became agitated. Over the years, in anger against God for taking his mother away, he became a disciple of Robert G. Ingersoll. Ingersoll, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century agnostic orator (also the son of a Presbyterian minister) wrote books dismantling the Bible, God, and Jesus, to the best of his ability. His work is impressive. I have read it more than once. His principle argument against believing in God can be found in his own words. Bottom line, his judgment is that the God of the Bible is neither good, righteous, or just because if He were, He would respond to the pain, suffering and evil in the world bring about healing. But instead the Bible records God sponsoring death and terror.

When my grandfather and I were conversing, he brought up many of these arguments critical of God's management of the universe. As you remember, Job is critical as well. And of course, so is much of the world, even this very day. So as my grandfather expounded on God's faulty management of the universe, I asked him, "Do you think you are more intelligent than God?" to which he answered, "Yes"! Because, he noted, if he were God, he would do something about the pain, suffering and evil in the world. Now before you poo-poo my grandfather, let's be very careful here because there are a number among us who have felt the same way or at least have wondered about where a loving God is in all this. And remember, Job, (like my grandfather and millions of others like the protesting agnostics and atheists) felt he had a greater sense of righteousness and justice

than God did. Unfortunately, in my youth, lack of wisdom and knowledge, I had no answers for my grandfather, and knew that simplistic and ignorant platitudes weren't going to suffice. I regret that as I grew to a greater understanding and to a point where I could offer some alternative truths, he had long since died. My wife and I did explain the gospel to him and showed extraordinary kindness to him which impressed him to consider the truth of what we presented, but to this day I don't know his destiny.

I say all this to reflect upon Elihu's criticism of Job who was in the same mind lock as so many have been through the ages to this day, considering God unjust, unrighteous, and cruel. Elihu's question then, is quite germane isn't it? He asked Job, "Do you believe that justice can be determined when you state on the one hand, 'I have a greater sense of justice than God does', and on the other, 'after all, what difference does it make to Him whether I live righteously or sinfully?'" In regard to this last point in his question, Elihu points out that God is neither effected nor manipulated by a man's moral or spiritual conduct. You can follow this argument in the remainder of the chapter.

In chapter 36, Elihu goes on to explain to Job that God is neither blind nor ignorant of the condition of men. God has given man the freedom to choose to trust and be obedient to Him regardless of their circumstances before during or after such a choice. Remember, Satan was defeated by Job's insistence that he would not cease trusting in God regardless of the circumstances. Satan stated that those who believe in Him do so because of what they get from him. In other words, they are only fair weather believers. Elihu points out the foolishness of this view as well. This is not how God works. Yet, there is much teaching in the churches right now that God prospers the devoted with material wealth and withholds blessings from those who are not devoted, especially when it comes to the releasing of their money.

God simply makes known His will and his commands. He points out the transgression of people (without prejudice, favoritism or preference), but people are free to choose as they will. The consequences follow their choice. Chapter 36 is Elihu's dissertation about all this and I invite you to read chapters 35 and 36 in their entirety.

Moving now to chapter 37 Elihu eloquently transitions to God's unfathomable majesty and the wonder and awe we experience in the operations of creation both in the heavens and the earth.

37:1-5,

1: "At this also my heart trembles, And leaps from its place. 2: "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 lightning when His voice is heard. 5: "God thunders with His voice wondrously, Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.

And then he says to Job in 37:14-24 in a final upbraiding to Job,

14: "Listen to this, O Job, Stand and consider the wonders of God. 15: "Do you know how God establishes them, And makes the lightning of His cloud to shine?  
16: "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? 18: "Can you, with Him, spread out the skies, Strong as a molten mirror?  
19: "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? 21: "Now men do not see the light which is bright in the skies; But the wind has passed and cleared them. 22: "Out of the north comes golden *splendor*; Around God is awesome majesty. 23: "The Almighty--we cannot find Him; He is exalted in power And He will not do violence to justice and abundant righteousness. 24: "Therefore men fear Him; He does not regard any who are wise of heart."

Elihu's speech prompts the humility and awe we should all have as we consider the magnificence of God, especially as it is revealed in creation. There can be no question whether He has provided for us all. There is no question of His care for that which He has created. There is no question that He has given us instruction as to how to live a life of trust in Him, the consequences of which are blessings. There is no question that it isn't God who has screwed it all up, but us. I wish I had thought of this simple truth when I spoke to my grandfather.

## **THE BOOK OF JOB**

### **CHAPTERS THIRTY EIGHT - THIRTY NINE** **CONDENSED SUMMARY**

So here we are, nearing the end of the book. Our five heroes have discussed their thoughts about why Job has suffered so terribly and how God is to be understood in all of it and, for the most part, they have come up empty. Job's three friends addressed Job claiming he has suffered his "just desserts" for his wickedness (which we know to be an incorrect appraisal). Then Elihu spoke up and rejected their analysis and addressed Job's laments strongly saying,

35: 'Job speaks without knowledge, And his words are without wisdom. 36: '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.'

Elihu says this because Job has attributed to God qualities and characteristics that are most uncomplimentary. For example, Job, in his pain and agony addressed God and said,

"What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, So that I am a burden to myself? "Why then do You not pardon my transgression And take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust; And You will seek me, but I will not be." (7:20-21)

Then in his hopelessness Job concluded that God didn't care about anyone alleging,

"Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty. 'He destroys both the guiltless and the wicked.' 9:20-22

Job lamented about his suffering and called on God to tell him why saying, "I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. "I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; Let me know why You contend with me. 'Is it right for You indeed to oppress, To reject the labor of Your hands, And to look favorably on the schemes of the wicked?'" (10:1-3)

"Then call, and I will answer; Or let me speak, then reply to me. "How many are my iniquities and sins? Make known to me my rebellion and my sin. "Why do You hide Your face And consider me Your enemy?" (13:22-24)

Job complains, accuses God then justifies himself saying, "God hands me over to ruffians And tosses me into the hands of the wicked. "I was at ease, but He shattered me, And He has grasped me by the neck and shaken me to pieces; He has also set me up as His target. "His arrows surround me. Without mercy He splits my kidneys open; He pours out my gall on the ground. "My face is flushed from weeping, And deep darkness is on my eyelids, Although there is no violence in my hands, And my prayer is pure." (16:11-17) He goes on,

"Know then that God has wronged me And has closed His net around me. "Behold, I cry, 'Violence!' but I get no answer; I shout for help, but there is no justice. "He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass, And He has put darkness on my paths. "He has stripped my honor from me And removed the crown from my head. "He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone; And He has uprooted my hope like a tree." (19:6-10)

Finally, Job cries out to his friends in his despair, "Pity me, pity me, O you my friends, For the hand of God has struck me. "Why do you persecute me as God *does*, And are not satisfied with my flesh? (19:21-22)

To God he pleads, "I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You turn Your attention against me. "You have become cruel to me; With the might of Your hand You persecute me." (30:20-21)

Based on these accusations, Job demands that God give an account of Himself. "Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature; Let the Almighty answer me! And the indictment which my adversary has written, "I would declare to Him the number of my steps; Like a prince I would approach Him." (31:35-37)

By now, in Job's shoes, many might possibly give up on any kind of faith in God. But we also have these statements about Job and by Job in the midst of wrenching, heartbreaking agony and physical pain.

For example, to Satan God said, "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." (1:8)

And Job, after losing everything he had worked for and his children 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." And we are told, "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God." (Job 1:21-22)

Job said in the midst of the attacks against him be his three friends, "But it is still my consolation, And I rejoice in unsparing pain, That I have not denied the words of the Holy One." (6:10)

And, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him..." (13:15)

And, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. (19:25)

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

Now, the Lord God, the Creator of the universe and everything in it is going to reply to Job, not because Job demanded it but because the book is written for the edification of its readers. God wants us to know that in even the midst of terrible heartbreak and suffering, we are way off base trying to bring God into account or questioning His sovereignty. Yet even when we do, God does not reject us or abandon us. The thoughts and words Job has expressed about where God is in the midst of human suffering and catastrophe are the common expressions of a very ignorant humanity. Job then, is representative of how we feel about God when great pain and hurt is upon us or others we care about wondering if God cares. And we are wrong. Even "If we are faithless," the Scripture says, "He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." II Timothy 2:13

Now, as we once again set our eyes on the stage where this drama is playing out, we see Job still sitting on his burned trash heap surrounded by his four companions. All are silent. From the east a storm is building and amidst the storm a great whirlwind, perhaps a tornado is forming. It rapidly approaches our five heroes. But it wreaks no havoc and is quiet, mysterious and frightening. Like the star of Bethlehem, comes to rest near the place where the five men sit. Then out of this silent whirlwind a firm, clear, deep voice speaks.

Job 38:1-3,

1: Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2: "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3: "Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!"

Here is God being sarcastic. Now as we listen in, The Lord begins a lengthy interrogation of Job addressing not just Job, but all who would presume to judge and evaluate God's management of the universe, thinking they know better than He. Using directed sarcasm in rhetorical questions, here is how the Lord continues:

38:4-7,

4: "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?"

This is simply God's way of asking, "Who do you think you are?" And stating, "You have no idea what you are talking about when you utter ignorant and foolish words from your highly limited understanding and power." God goes on:

12-18,

12: "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? Job 14: "It is changed like clay *under* the seal; And they stand forth like a garment. 15: "From the wicked their light is withheld, And the uplifted arm is broken. 16: "Have you entered into the springs of the sea Or 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."

It is important to note that in the entirety of God's speech He never once addresses the questions Job or anyone else has about God's role within the suffering world. He never answers the many "why" questions or the "how come" or "what if" questions or any of humanities accusations against God. He simply and directly confronts the appropriateness of the questions themselves And condemns man's arrogance in judging the Almighty. And that in itself is the answer to the "whys". Work on figuring this out.

Finally, the reason God is employing sarcasm in His address to Job and to us and to all mankind is because, Not only does He refuse to be called into account or answer man's questions, but has decided instead to question man about his self aggrandizing place within the creation, and his wisdom, power, and pride in thinking he is a better manager of things than is God himself. Further, noting how all the men expressed awe in the creation, God returns to this theme in His questions. Let's look at a few more of God's questions for us humans.

Job 38:31-36,

31: "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? 34: "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, So that an abundance of water will cover you? 35: "Can you send forth lightning that they may go And say to you, 'Here we are'?"

These are rhetorical questions requiring the obvious answer, "no". The purpose of these questions and the obvious answer is...? Your turn.

God using further rhetorical questions continues to list all the things man cannot do, has never done and will never know.

39:1-2,

1: "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?"

Continuing in 26-30:

26: "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."

Job 40:1-2,

1: "Then the LORD said to Job, 2: "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it."

Now, The Lord says, "You answer". The demand is to the "faultfinder". The term faultfinder is the Hebrew word "Yah-sar". This word is used to describe one who would think to chastise - with words or even with blows, or to chasten, correct, instruct, discipline, punish, reform, reprove, warn, or teach... God.

And there it is. Job, like so many, has presumed many things about God, brought accusation against God, thought himself superior to God and demanded answers of God. The tables are now turned. God has laid out His case before Job (and all of us of course) and demanded we answer. In so doing, God has established His sovereignty over all things, including man. We will look at this important theme later. Now, from the

beginning of this study, we made it clear that it is not God's responses that are our concern but ours. So while we reflect on what God has asked and the point He has made in His interrogations, what should our answers be?

We will conclude with Job's answers and their significance next time.

**THE BOOK OF JOB**  
**CHAPTER FORTY**  
**CONDENSED SUMMARY**

Have your children ever accused you of being unfair? Or called into question your decisions about their life? Have they ever become angry or frustrated when you said, “No”? When they asked the whys of your decisions did you ever say something like, “Because we (or I) know best or used the words of authority such as “Because I said so, period – end of discussion.” Well, welcome to God’s world. We are God’s children, and may have thought, said or prayed something like this when we were unhappy or upset. And, like our own children, we may have more than once been dissatisfied with God’s “Because I told you so”. Yet this type of response is pretty close to that with which God addressed Job.

God never once addressed Job’s questions about His role within the suffering world or about His management of the universe. In fact God refuses to be called into account or answer man’s questions, but decides instead to question man about his self aggrandizing place within the creation, and his wisdom, power, and pride in thinking he is a better manager of things than is God Himself. God asks such questions as,

38:4-7,

4: "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?

12-18,

12: "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? Job 14: "It is changed like clay *under* the seal; And they stand forth like a garment. 15: "From the wicked their light is withheld, And the uplifted arm is broken. 16: "Have you entered into the springs of the sea Or 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.

Job wisely remained silent.

Then in 40:1-2, 1: "Then the LORD said to Job, 2: "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it."

The Lord says, "You answer". The demand is to the "faultfinder". Remember from last week the term is defined in the Hebrew as one who would think to chastise – with words or even with blows, or to chasten, correct, instruct, discipline, punish, reform, reprove, warn, or teach... God.

The challenge isn't just for Job, but for all mankind, and in attempting to respond to God's demand that we answer the almighty and teach Him wisdom, we find ourselves backed against the wall by God's justified finger pointing at our total lack of wisdom, experience and knowledge. We have no answer for God. And that is the point of the book. We are totally out of line demanding that God give an account of His management of the universe to us. In fact, Proverbs 10:19 says, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise."

And there it is. Job, like so many, has presumed many things about God, brought accusation against God, thought himself superior to God and demanded answers of God. The tables are now turned. God has laid out His case before Job (and all of us) and demanded we answer. So while we reflect on what God has asked and the point He has made in His interrogations including His demand that we answer His questions, what should our answer be? Here, Job himself teaches us.

40:3-5

3: Then Job answered the LORD and said, 4: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5: "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more."

But God isn't through. We are a stubborn, stiff-necked, hardheaded, rebellious bunch and need a lesson in humility and wisdom. So God continues the interrogation.

6: Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said, 7: "Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. 8: "Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? In other words, "Will you count Me wrong that your opinion about Me will be rendered correct?"

Two good women gave testimonies that fit well here. Both have gone some very trying times. For one, her husband's very serious medical problems have caused him life

threatening challenges and lengthy disabilities.

For the other, she has suffered for a year with infections in her pancreas and other medical problems that laid her on her back for months in a state of near helplessness, something that caused her great stress. Yet both of them, last week, noted how God used their individual situations to bring about blessing and learning in their lives and were so grateful for it.

What at first could rightly be called a curse was turned into blessing by the Almighty. We know at the end of the book of Job was blessed and restored. Yet it isn't the outcome that is the point, but the sustained faith of those who suffered without knowing why, in the midst of times where their faith in God could have wavered, but did not! That is the most important thing of all. "Though He slay me yet will I trust him", Job said. And upon that the grace of God came to pass in his life.

We have a propensity, as I have mentioned before, to put God in the middle of everything as if we actually understood what is going on. We make pronouncements about things as if we actually had some insight into God's mind. We are quick to judge saying, "That is a blessing from God"; or, "God did this for a reason"; or "God has a purpose in this for you"; or "God is testing you (or me)"; or "God is disciplining you"; or ask, "Why did God do this, allow this or bring this into my life?" and questions like that.

One pastor told a story about a year ago that he borrowed from "The Eye Of The Storm" by Max Lucado. You might know it, but it bears repeating.

### **A Blessing or a Curse?**

"Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before--such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength."

"People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. 'This horse is not a horse to me,' he would tell them. 'It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?' The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse."

"One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. 'You old fool,' they scoffed, 'We told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could

have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you've been cursed with misfortune."

"The old man responded, 'Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I've been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?'"

"The people contested, 'Don't make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse.'"

"The old man spoke again. 'All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don't know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can't say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?'"

"The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool."

"After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. 'Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us.'"

"The man responded, 'Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don't judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase? Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don't say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don't.'"

"'Maybe the old man is right,' they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.'"

"The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After

a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments."

"'You were right,' they said. 'You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever.'"

"The old man spoke again. 'You people are obsessed with judging. Don't go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments.'"

"It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again."

"'You were right, old man,' they wept. 'God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son's accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever.'"

"The old man spoke again. 'It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows.'"

This is a fine story by Max Lucado and adds illumination to the point of the book of Job.

In concluding this portion of our study, let's return to 40:9-14 and read God's continuing interrogation of Job and God's point. God asks Job,

9: "Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His? Maybe he is God is the sarcastic question. So God challenges Job: 10: "Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity, And clothe yourself with honor and majesty. 11: "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*.

Then the unsaid question before 14 is, "If you can do this, if you are God..."

14: "Then I will also confess to you, That your own right hand can save you."

Albert Barnes rephrases what God says this way, "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 (Job) 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." God's point in verse 14 is clear, and it applies to us all.

Job's earlier response can be applied as well when he said, : "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5: "Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more." Perhaps it is time to recognize our place and shut our mouths. That's what I am going to do right now.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

### CHAPTERS FORTY ONE -FORTY TWO CONDENSED SUMMARY

Isaiah 40 and Job 41

I want to begin this by noting a three minute segment from Mike Huckabee's program on Fox cable. He is interviewing actor Kelsey Grammer. Notice how the actor was affected by what happened to him: (Father and sister murdered at different times)

At the center of Grammer's collapse was the unsaid question and accusation, "Why God, did you allow this horror to happen?" We have a propensity, as I have mentioned before, to put God in the middle of everything- as if we actually understood what is going on. We make pronouncements about things as if we actually had some insight into God's mind. We are quick to judge saying, "That is a blessing from God"; or, "God did this for a reason"; or "God has a purpose in this for you"; or "God is testing you (or me)"; or "God is disciplining you"; or ask, "Why did God do this, allow this or bring this into my life?" and questions like that.

But we have learned in Job that it is neither God's management of the universe that we need to question, nor that He give account of Himself to us. We have seen that it is not His responses to our accusations and questions we need to be concerned with, but our responses to Him in the midst of human suffering and horror. Our responses are the key to enduring hardship and suffering. The real statements to be made are, "Lord assist me in sustaining the faith I need to trust you through all of this." Or, God grant me the courage to persevere onward in my walk with Jesus in spite of these barricades that would seek to cause me to stumble." Or, most importantly, to remain silent and wait upon the Lord. Why? Because as the book closes, this is what is taught by it.

Notice how the following passage from Isaiah reflects the story of Job.

Isaiah 40:27-31, 27: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and assert, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, And the justice due me escapes the notice of my God"? 28: Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. 29: He gives strength to the weary, And to *him who* lacks might He increases power. 30: Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men

stumble badly, 31: Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.”

Now, Job chapters 41 and 42 as we conclude the Book of Job. God also concludes His interrogation of Job and of us who are reading this book. The point of the book is again stated at the conclusion of the interrogation. As we have seen in the past two weeks, God is impressing upon Job His own magnificence and sovereignty versus Job’s severe limitations in experience, knowledge, wisdom and power. Now, God continues to use rhetorical questions regarding a fierce beast called “Leviathan”. Let’s take a moment to introduce this creature. Leviathan is the English transliteration of the Hebrew “liv-yah-than”. There have been numerous attempts to pin down this creature among earth’s extant creatures. Whales, giant crocodiles (the closest approximation), some large snake and the Rhinoceros have been suggested, as well the mythical dragon, or some mythical creature of the sea that the Jews termed Leviathan because they had no idea what lay below the surface - but knew there was something dangerous there. Perhaps we might even consider some heavenly creature such as Seraphim or Cherubim. Even so, all fail to fulfill the descriptions here and in other places. Even if one were to suggest some specie of dinosaur, even that would fall short. A combination of all the creatures mentioned so far might come close, yet even this would fail to do justice to Leviathan. So let me give you what my opinion is as to what this creature is. I have no idea. So with this in mind, we listen in to God as he berates Job for the final time (41:1-10). God asks Job,

Job 41:1-10,

1: "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? 3: "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? 5: "Will you play with him as with a bird, Or will you bind him for your maidens? 6: "Will the traders bargain over him? Will they divide him among the merchants? 7: "Can you fill his skin with harpoons, Or his head with fishing spears?"

The expected, but unvoiced answer to these rhetorical questions is to be? (“No”) The point is to illustrate how truly powerless man is, while all this is child’s play for the Lord. God goes on taunting Job by saying,

41:8-10,

8: "Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle; you will not do it again! 9: "Behold,

your expectation is false; Will you be laid low even at the sight of him? 10: "No one is so fierce that he dares to arouse him; Who then is he that can stand before Me?"

Job has said he wished to stand in court before God and place his case before God. In view of his own righteousness, he never thought it might be an inappropriate desire. Here God notes that a man could not stand before the Lord. In Exodus 33:20 God told Moses, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" But this is not the point here. The point God makes is that no one could stand before the fierceness of God. Leviathan is a baby asleep in the cradle compared to God.

Then the Lord goes on to ask an important question:

41:11, "Who has given to Me that I should repay *him*? *Whatever* is under the whole heaven is Mine."

In other words, "What is it that God owes to man for man's great gifts to God?" Everything in creation is God's. What else is there we can give to God for which He is obliged to repay? The Lord continues about Leviathan. Whatever this creature is, God is impressed with the creature for the primary reason that man is essentially helpless against it.

41:12, "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. 18: "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."

The Lord continues to describe this creature concluding with verse 33-34:

33-34, "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."

Man becomes angry and shakes his fist at God because he is powerless to control the things that afflict him. Perhaps that is the true Leviathan. But at the same time man projects his power and intelligence as if he were God, denying submission to God. Then God is blamed for the evil that man himself brings upon the world. The pride of man

makes him feel he should be exempt from the human environment and when tragedy or suffering occurs, he cries out, “Why me, Oh God?” Yet he is powerless against Leviathan making him very unqualified to stand up against God or assume to take God’s place in any manner whatsoever. And, as this creature is not able to be managed or intimidated by man, so neither is God.

Here is the point God is making while interrogating Job and all who read this book. There is none greater than the almighty. He is the sovereign creator and Lord of the universe. He has done and can do exceedingly, abundantly, above anything man can even ask or think.<sup>12</sup> So, before man draws conclusions about God - or man’s own place in the order of things - and places his trust and confidence in any of them, man needs to consider that his confidence and trust ought to be in the Lord who is sovereign over all things. Thus Job answers,

42:1-6,

1: “Then Job answered the LORD and said, 2: "I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. 3: 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' [Job repeats what God said to him as an admission that he knows nothing with which to give counsel] "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." 4: 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.' [Job again has repeated what God said to him to acknowledge his foolishness] 5: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; 6: Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes." [“Retract” is a terrible translation. I have no idea what the translators were thinking. It should read, “I abhor (reject, or despise myself or cast myself away like garbage), And I repent in dust and ashes.”

Job’s response was the only correct one, but he was a little harsh on himself. God’s interrogation did what it was designed to do. We return from poetry to prose in verses 7-17. This section is the epilogue.

42:7-8,

7: " It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "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.

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 3:20

8: "Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. 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."

Again, the words "I will accept him" (Job) fall far short. Literally the phrase means "I will lift up his face or countenance." God intends to raise Job from depression, hopelessness and defeat. He begins by announcing that Job is indeed His servant.

42:9 , "So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite *and* Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job. [Again, "lifted up his face or countenance"]

And we are aware of the rest of the story. 42:10 summarizes it for us.

10: "The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold."

We are familiar with this conclusion to the book. But it is vital that we do not misunderstand the body of this work in terms of receiving some reward or blessing because we remained relatively faithful to God. This book is written to help us grow in wisdom, not in material wealth or some undefined blessing. For those of faith who might think in terms of rewards, the equalizer is Hebrews 11:32-40.

32: And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33: who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of* righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34: quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35: Women received *back* their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36: and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37: They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38: (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39: And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40: because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect."

If we have ever thought that desired "blessings" will come to us because of our faith, as if

God owed us something, then we must seriously consider that our faith may not only not result in desired “blessings” but may bring us terrible pain and suffering. Hopefully, after this brief study in the book of Job, we will know exactly how to respond to God.

Remaining verses.

Job 42:11-17,

11: "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 adversities that the LORD had brought on him. And each one gave him one piece of money, and each a ring of gold. 12: 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. 13: He had seven sons and three daughters. 14: He named the first Jemimah, and the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. 15: In all the land no women were found so fair as Job's daughters; and their father gave them inheritance among their brothers. 16: After this, Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons and his grandsons, four generations. 17: And Job died, an old man and full of days."

## APPENDIX

### INTERLUDE

First, in our study of Job, we have been pressed into looking carefully at the nature and character of God. In fact last week, I asked, “Is God unjust, cruel and uncaring?” Those who answered said “no”. Then after class and during the week I kept getting responses like, “God brings these things into our lives for a beneficial purpose.” Well, over the past eight weeks, many of you have offered similar sentiments we will examine in a moment. Perhaps our upbringing is partly to blame. We have heard our parents, friends, relatives, people at church, pastors, things we have read and have accepted them without thinking of the implication of those sentiments. The implication is that somehow and in some way God inflicts evil, pain, suffering, tragedy and loss while at the same time doing this for some higher purpose or benefit to us poor slob down here. And yet we would vehemently deny that God is evil or the source of evil. We end up a little confused. So we must stop and confront this idea. That we experience evil, pain, suffering, tragedy and loss is undeniable. That God is the cause of it is a whole other matter.

Secondly, we are dealing with a literary genre that we do not grasp very easily. We are dealing with wisdom literature. I suggest that wisdom literature must, by its very nature, be understood using a different set of glasses than we use with other types of writing presented before us in the Bible. All of it is in poetic form with an exception here and there. And, it is the most seldom studied or read with Psalms the only possible exception. Even Psalms is sifted and we often just read those passages that bring us comfort or hope. But wisdom literature is a different animal than, say, the history presented to us in Kings and Chronicles for example. This statement may confuse some of you and you may disagree, but it is true none the less.

Finally, the conclusions drawn about God’s place in inflicting pain and evil and His purpose in doing so is often based on the prologue of Job, and our common way of trying to understand the prologue is distorting and over-shadowing the intent of the book in the minds of way too many in the class. It is hard for us to get this out of our minds. But for a moment, I would suggest you to take the prologue of the book and set it on a shelf for a little while, hopefully coming to the place where you can honestly say, “I am not quite sure how to view this right now in light of other passages about all of this.”

Those other passages I am now going to present, first setting a premise and trying to support it. I would like you to actually come to believe it.

PREMISE: “GOD IS NEITHER EVIL NOR THE SOURCE OF EVIL”!

We may not believe God is evil or the source of evil, but we might have an uncertain assurance. Here are some scriptural passages that affirm the premise:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” I John 1:5 (Darkness is a metaphor for evil.)

“For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You.” Psalm 5:4

“For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.” Deuteronomy 32:3-4

“Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate.” Psalm 116:5

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.” James 1:13-14

Here is another way of saying it as John states the nature and character of God in a different way, a way we describe God all the time:

“The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” I John 4:8

Leading to this question: If God were the source of evil, then how could the following passages apply?

“(love) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.” I Corinthians 13:6

“Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter *water*? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.” James 3:11-12

“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Matthew 7:16-18

“But when the Pharisees heard *this*, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?" Matthew 12:24-26

The answer is that there is no way God could be evil or the source of evil and still have these verses be true.

I want you to consider the following e-mail that has been circulating for some time. Consider if you will, if you are comfortable with the understanding that this is the way God thinks and works. Is the premise assumed by Galatians 6:7 justified by the following examples? Remember, i did not write this but just reporting the way some people think about God.

Premise: “Death is certain but the Bible speaks about untimely death! Make a personal reflection about this....Very interesting, read until the end.....It is written in the Bible (Galatians 6:7): “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sow, that shall he also reap.”

Here are some men and women who mocked God.

John Lennon (Singer): Some years before, during his interview with an American Magazine, he said: 'Christianity will end, it will disappear. I do not have to argue about that. I am certain. Jesus was ok, but his subjects were too simple, today we are more famous than Him' (1966). Lennon, after saying that the Beatles were more famous than Jesus Christ, was shot six times.

Tancredo Neves (President of Brazil ): During the Presidential campaign, he said if he got 500,000 votes from his party, not even God would remove him from Presidency. Sure he got the votes, but he got sick a day before being made President, then he died.

Cazuza (Bi-sexual Brazilian composer, singer and poet): During A show in Canecio ( Rio de Janeiro ) while smoking his cigarette, he puffed out some smoke into the air and said:'God, that's for you.' He died at the age of 32 of LUNG CANCER in a horrible manner.

The man who built the Titanic. After the construction of Titanic, a reporter asked him how safe the Titanic would be. With an ironic tone he said: 'Not even God can

sink it.' The result: I think you all know what happened to the Titanic. Marilyn Monroe was visited by Billy Graham during a presentation of a show. He said the Spirit of God had sent him to preach to her. After hearing what the Preacher had to say, she said, 'I don't need your Jesus.' A week later, she was found dead in her apartment.

Bon Scott (Singer) the ex-vocalist of the AC/DC. On one of his 1979 songs he sang: 'Don't stop me; I'm going down all the way, down the highway to hell'. On the 19th of February 1980, Bon Scott was found dead, he had been choked by his own vomit.

In Campinas (2005), Brazil a group of friends, drunk, went to pick up a friend....The mother accompanied her to the car and was so worried about the drunkenness of her friends and she said to the daughter holding her hand, who was already seated in the car: My Daughter, Go With God And May He Protect You.

She responded: 'Only If He (God) Travels In The Trunk, Cause Inside Here.....It's Already Full ' Hours later, news came by that they had been involved in a fatal accident, everyone had died, the car could not be recognized what type of car it had been, but surprisingly, the trunk was intact. The police said there was no way the trunk could have remained intact. To their surprise, inside the trunk was a crate of eggs, none was broken

Christine Hewitt (Jamaican Journalist and entertainer) said the Bible (Word of God) was the worst book ever written. In June 2006 she was found burnt beyond recognition in her motor vehicle.”

End of e-mail

Comment

What is inferred from the content of the stories and the quotation from Galatians? And, is this an accurate description of how God deals with those who mock and sneer at Him? And which of us has not sinned in a similar way? God knows our hearts and the scripture says that the heart of man is wicked above all things and that there is none righteous, none not one. Let's compare the inferences this e-mail presents with the following passages:

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from

your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' Ezekiel 33:11

"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." John 3:17

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." II Peter 3:9

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Romans 2:4

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:3-4

*Remembering the promise we agreed with. "God is neither evil nor the source of evil", Which view of God's dealing with man's sneering and mocking is more in keeping with the nature and character of God?*

Finally, when people mocked and sneered at Jesus during and after He was being crucified, His response was...?

Remember we are not taught not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good. It is difficult to imagine God telling us to be like this when He himself returns evil for evil. Evil seeks to destroy Good. Good seeks to save and redeem evil.

After hearing of someone's collapse or catastrophe in some way, have you ever heard the expression, "They certainly didn't deserve that". Could this be a subtle accusation against some cosmic force (not to mention the possibility that God might be included here) of the lack of justice in the universe. Would the same be true of the expression, "They got what they deserved?" Is our idea of "justice" ever the standard of how and why we view events, and as Christians, do we place God in the middle of it? May I suggest that man cannot determine what is right by his own standards and then assume God agrees and acts accordingly by what man thinks is right. In other words, man's philosophical and theological presuppositions about all this do not necessarily reflect what God deems to be right and just. The proof is the crucifixion, where the Son of God paid the penalty for our sins. Justice would have been the eradication or eternal damnation of all mankind for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God...And the wages of sin is death. Who would have ever thought that God's justice would be accomplished by Him paying the price for our redemption on the cross? Would it have been more in keeping with the e-mail that God prompt someone to shoot us as John Lennon was shot?

In reading these below, there might be objections and questions about them. Please be patient but please think about the implications these sentiments present in terms of the God's role in suffering, pain and evil.

Generally referring to pain, tragedy or evil in one's life we hear these common phrases:

“God will never give us more than we can handle!”

“God is testing me!”

“God is in control and has a purpose in all of this!”

“God is doing this for one's own good!”

“God took it away to give me something better!”

“Everything has a purpose”

“God permitted (or allowed) this for a higher purpose” or “This was due to God's ‘permissive will’”

“There is a reason for everything”

“God did this for a Reason” or “has a purpose in all this”, or

“God is in charge of, in control of, everything?”

#### Comment

The implication is that somehow God has brought this into our lives for a higher or more beneficial purpose and these are some of the phrases often used to explain why evil, pain, suffering, tragedy, horror and catastrophe come into the lives of people, subtly implying that God either did it, allowed it or didn't prevent it for some higher purpose. In reference to the common idea that “God allows or permits” evil in our lives, the scripture never says this and in fact says the exact opposite; God will NOT allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure and will NOT allow us to become spiritually disintegrated.<sup>13</sup>

First, I have seldom heard these phrases used in references to good things happening in the life of someone.

“Oh my, God is giving me more money than I can handle!”

Perhaps all this can be summed up with a traditionally theological statement:

*“God is orchestrating all of this for His glory!” (or for some other beneficial purpose)*

We must deal with the contrasting issues I have presented here. Let me also say that

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<sup>13</sup> Note: Exodus 12:23; Psalm 66:9; Proverbs 10:3; Acts 13:35; I Corinthians 10:13

there are more than adequate scriptural responses to all the objections and questions that have been raised in our minds. My question is, why do these things persist in our minds and why is the truth or validity of them never questioned?

Let me suggest that many of these kinds of expressions and this kind of thinking is based on Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.”

What we assume but what is neither stated nor implied is that the “all things” is also from God.

For example, here is a classic: “God has brought this into my life (or permitted it) to make me stronger.” God, because of His power, grace and mercy will work to make you stronger, but it doesn’t mean that he brought you the disaster in the first place. After God works it out for your good you can praise Him for His love and care of course, but I wouldn’t credit Him with the evil that started it all in the first place if I were you, unless of course, the afore reviewed passages are untrue. Now as to scriptural foundations of these glib statements. There are none. However, in several places the Bible does mention that God will not allow us to suffer to the point of spiritual disability or disintegration which is quite different than God brings suffering into our life for some divine purpose.

And, can we reconcile all this common confusion with what the scripture clearly says about the nature and character of God? Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

I am suggesting that God does not create the evil so that He can make something good from it. If this was the case, I would wonder about the sanity of those who think of our God like this, and wonder why, like Job, anyone in their right mind would worship a God like this. Yet many have commented to me these same sentiments, and seem unable to get past them.

Have you ever heard a non-believer say, “Well, if that’s the kind of God you worship, count me out!” Well, I agree.

Now where do these ideas come from? This kind of convoluted thinking comes from the Reformed churches steeped in Calvinistic theology: Presbyterian, Baptist, United Church of Christ, Congregationalists, Reformed Church of America, some of the German Reformed churches, and so on.

Now a partial answer.

“We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one.”  
I John 5:18-19

But the question is, “Why does the world lie in the power of the Evil One?”

Related questions:

1. Why doesn't God prevent evil if He is good?
2. What about God's pouring out His wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, the Egyptians and so on?
3. How come God doesn't answer the prayers of the suffering and hurting if He loves them?
4. What does it mean that God “hardens hearts”?
5. Why is the world evil (or under the power of the Evil One)?
6. What is the source of evil? Is it Satan?
7. How do we understand a statement like, “If God is willing?” as it relates to the “permissive will” question.
8. How do we understand “God's will” for our lives and our plans?
9. And, in this light, how do we understand “God's plan” for our lives?
10. How do we understand the matter of “free will”?
11. If God doesn't “permit” or allow “suffering” in the world, then why do we suffer? (converse of question 1)
12. If God doesn't “control” everything, what does He control, and why can't we say He controls everything?
13. How do we reconcile God's sovereignty with the idea of God's control?

14. What does it mean to pray according to “God’s will”?
15. How do we reconcile the idea of God testing us if God doesn’t bring evil into our lives to accomplish the testing?
16. Doesn’t God have control over Satan and the demons and thus over evil?
17. If God knew all this horror would occur by creating man, why did He do it?

Note: These questions assume the basic question, “If God is so powerful and loving then why...?”

Do we ever consider the question, “If man were not disobedient to God or evil then what kind of a world would we live in?”