

To Speak Well of God

An Exposition of the Book of Job

John A Pople

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“Have you considered my servant Job?”

Job 1:8

Prologue

Under Stanford Oaks

The Californian summer sun was quite low: wan but warm, adding that rich hue to human skin that only a setting sun can. Tom, a Stanford philosophy graduate of the class of '69, and I sat at picnic tables beneath the gnarled, almost eternal, branches of the oak trees in the beautiful garden environment of the Stanford campus. A couple of glasses of chilled white wine suffused the scene and, as usual, philosophical musing was well underway.

On this occasion, Tom had proposed a model comprising the concept that existence could be understood as an interface where man, rising from beneath, encounters God, coiling down from above to meet him. At this interface each human is confronted with a living experience of the Maker, which interaction causes the individual to either rise into the realm of the spiritual body of God, metaphorically speaking, or, if unable to sustain resonance, to collapse back down into the ever-recycling mulch of the purely physical universe.

The subject was engaging: in particular, the notion of the interface caught my attention. What I took from the conversation especially was the fact that interfaces are essentially “where life happens.” For example, the soft metal sodium, which appears quite inert in air, exhibits a violent, near explosive, reaction with water and can burst into flames on contact with it. One learns

striking things about sodium when one sees it at an interface with water. I'm a scientist by profession,¹ so the concept of the physics at an interface between two mediums being the primary determinant of the material properties of the bulk, above and beyond the inherent properties of either medium, is a familiar one.

The interface model is useful in describing human dynamics too. We may think we know a friend, but what we experience is how they interact with us, not the essence of who they are when we're not there. Only when we've seen our friend operate at many interfaces, interacting with many different people, can we begin to deduce their core nature.

I think the concept of the interface helps us understand the book of Job. God is trying to teach us the inherent nature of Himself, Satan and the Righteous man, and He does so primarily by showing the nature of the interfaces between them; the features manifested when they interact. I believe this is a helpful model to adopt in understanding the signature issues of the book of Job: that famous, arguably infamous, Biblical drama by which I was becoming increasingly fascinated. The drama is presented as a sequence of interfaces between opposing parties, often in debate with each other.

God's question: "Have you considered my servant Job?" reverberated around my mind. I realized that frankly, in depth, I had not. I had read the book of Job many a time, but in truth I had not isolated the man for special mental meditation or study. The rising compulsion was also unusual – why should I trouble myself to consider Job anyway? After all, I was familiar enough with the text to know that God had directed His question to Satan, not me.

Hadn't He?

¹ My professional training is in physics: I am an active research physicist at a synchrotron particle accelerator in California.

How this Interpretation Developed

There is a huge repository of material offering exposition of the book of Job, and one could justifiably postulate whether yet another tome is either necessary or desirable. Bluntly, my opinion is that two necessary prerequisites are required to be met to publish a thesis for general appraisal: first, that one should have something original to offer (and this can never be manufactured; one either sees something new or one does not), and second, that the new opinion be of perceived value to those who might read it. I am keenly aware of those prerequisites and would not have penned this work without a sincere belief that both could hopefully be met. As hinted above, this work is not the result of *pre-planned* research, for at no time did I consciously decide to study Job. This work is the result of compulsion. In fact, writing a book on anything was by no means desirable. A medical condition has limited the use of my hands: often the right hand provides no function at all, so the majority of this work was typed with one hand, which was frankly exasperating.

The book of Job had always held a fascination for me, simply because there were too many important and unanswered questions. The attempted explanations I'd encountered throughout my discipleship seemed either contrived or simply inadequate. Study on Job intensified during the five years from 2003 onwards and the exposition detailed here was first prepared as a series of invited lectures given at week-long North American summer Bible-study schools in Oregon (2004), Wisconsin (2005), Vermont (2006) and British Columbia (2007); growing and deepening with each iteration.

If you don't feel very familiar with the storyline, I would strongly encourage you to read the Biblical book of Job prior to reading this book. This task may be a little daunting: the book of Job can often be a perplexing, even depressing, tale at first appreciation. The central debate between Job and his three friends, about two-thirds of the volume of the book, yet only a

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small sliver of the advancing plot, may seem circular and very dry; arguably even tedious.

I offer a synopsis below. My attempt is to make this synopsis free of any interpretation and simply a presentation of the prima fascia facts.

Synopsis of the Biblical Drama of Job

Prologue (chapters 1-2, prose): God invites a character termed “the Satan” to consider the piety of his servant Job. The Satan counters that God fails to realize Job is only pious because he is well blessed in riches and, were he deprived, he would curse Him. God meets the Satan’s demands by Himself destroying Job’s fortunes, children and ultimately health. Yet Job does not curse God; the Satan loses the barter.

Debate (chapters 3-31, poetry): Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to sympathize with Job but, ultimately, they chastise him. A debate ensues where each speaker attacks Job in turn, calling him to repent of the sins they believe must have triggered his destruction, and Job replies in self-defense. Fourteen speeches and rebuttals are voiced, with the debate growing ever more heated and culminating in lengthy speeches from Job appealing to God to appear so that his (Job’s) righteousness can be revealed.

Intervention (chapters 32-41, poetry): Instead, a young witness, Elihu, speaks out. He too is critical of Job, yet limits his criticism to Job’s recent words, not lifestyle, all the while defending God as righteous.

Then God speaks (His longest speeches in the Bible!). He first presents a tour of creation, focusing especially on wild animals, observing that He can control them where Job cannot. When Job briefly responds, God rebukes him and launches a second speech focused wholly on His ability to control two beasts whose descriptions seem other-worldly. Job’s latter response states he has ‘seen God’ and avers a new life direction.

Epilogue (chapter 42, prose): God rebukes the three friends for not speaking correctly about Him; praises Job for succeeding in that regard; and directs Job to intercede in prayer for his friends, for God to forgive them. God then restores Job: he receives double of his previous blessings yet, while he receives twice as many flocks and herds as previously, he is only blessed to receive as many children as before.

Understandably, the plotline forms a mystery – arguably several mysteries!

Existing Expositions of Job

The book of Job is evidently presented as a dramatic play (although one I believe happened in real life), which means the plot hinges on a relatively small number of key events and key characters. Many serious questions are raised, perhaps chief of which being: “How can a loving God abuse His own disciple in this way? Why is it acceptable for God to seemingly experiment in human lives, willfully introducing intense pain otherwise not present, apparently for reasons of conducting some sort of philosophical experiment? Is human life so unimportant to this Deity that this is what we should anticipate?” These are hard-hitting questions; and ones all too often dodged.

For this reason, humanist expositions sometimes employ the book of Job as ammunition to demonstrate the apparent folly of appreciating the God of the Bible as loving or caring. Likewise Christian expositions of Job often populate the defensive portion of the spectrum. Some are outright depressed, having somewhat ceded in defeat to the notion that God’s conduct could ever be seen in a praiseworthy, or even justifiable, light. These expositions may postulate as a last ditch defense the highly dubious caveat that the God of grace is solely the God of the New Testament: as if to use that latter Testament as the rug under which to sweep the events of the former. Even those expositors who intend to present God in a good light still largely come across as caught on the back foot, seeking to defend a God

whom they can understand as being justifiably under fire. Often they seem keen to the point of desperation to point to Job's restoration as the justification of that which has gone before; as if to imply God can be excused his treatment of Job because He blessed him in the end. From what I see in the book of Job, the need for this defensiveness goes away.

I want to offer an explanation of the drama of Job which is consistent with the broader Bible message concerning God, man, the nature of evil and the source of suffering; and which will carry the message of God's goodness from an undistorted appreciation of the plot. Teachings from other scriptural books which can explain what is happening in the book of Job will take preference over other reference sources. Essentially, therefore, I am claiming the Biblical books form a common message and can be employed to interpret each other, an assumption with which I personally am very comfortable.²

Nevertheless it seems arrogant, or at least inefficient, not to explore existing expositions of Job. To that end I read more than forty expositions of Job, so that I could both refine my thinking and present this work in the light of existing ideas on the subject. A few principal works are referenced more frequently than others to provide the reader with a ready sense of the backdrop against which my exposition sits. The principal comparisons are generally with Christian expositions, simply because more points of connection are made with the plotline of the scriptural story.

From the broad spectrum of literature I have selected, for both comparative backdrop and my own edification, the work of

² Biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise marked. The NIV is chosen for its clarity of modern English and idiomatic expression; although the thoughts developed prove independent of the translation of the Bible employed. Quotations are marked parenthetically by book, chapter and verse, except in the case of quotations from the book of Job, where only chapter and verse are specified.

Gustav Gutierrez,³ a Catholic priest in South America; the library of works compiled by Nahum Glatzer,⁴ an Austro-Hungarian scholar of Jewish theology; the exposition of David Atkinson,⁵ an Anglican minister in England and the commentary of J. Vernon McGee,⁶ an Evangelical preacher from mid-West America. I also set this work alongside the expositions offered by other members of my own denomination, Brethren in Christ (Christadelphian). Of these I mainly reference the works of the Australian brothers David Baird⁷ and Ted Spongberg,⁸ as well as the English brothers Jack Balchin⁹ and L. G. Sargent.¹⁰ I include a few thoughts extracted from each exposition below to demonstrate the variety of different opinions Job generates and yet still highlight the absence of the main points I see in Job. I wish to share these précis with you so that when the names of these authors crop up during this exposition, you will have a sense of who they are, in terms of their particular flavor of exposition of Job's story.

Gutierrez is a Catholic priest who ministers in rural communities in Ayacucho, Peru, in South America. His writing is heavily influenced by a sense of sympathy for, and duty towards, the poor. Throughout his exposition he holds faithfully to his central view that the poor earn special favor with God. In that vein, Gutierrez understands Job as representing the archetypal innocent who suffers, and he sees a comparison between Job and the poor by correlating material poverty with spiritual innocence.

³ G. Gutierrez, "On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent," 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA

⁴ N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA

⁵ D. Atkinson, "The Message of Job," 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK

⁶ J. V. McGee, "Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job," 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA

⁷ D. Baird, "The Education of Job," 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia

⁸ E. M. Spongberg, "The Book of Job," 1965, private publication

⁹ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswel Books, Oswestry, UK

¹⁰ L. G. Sargent, "Ecclesiastes and Other Studies," 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK

Glatzer has composed an enormous compendium of opinion on Job spanning centuries of thought. He reproduces a number of lengthy excerpts from texts expousing Job, which he groups according to the Judaic, Christian and Humanist ideologies utilized by the writer. He offers brief thoughts of his own as an introduction to this library, in which he communicates the view that Job is a depressing tale of an emotionally distant God, who strong-arms Job into submission to His will and recognition of His greatness. Glatzer is unimpressed with many expositions which he feels fail to address the chilling questions the drama raises.

Atkinson's approach is very straightforward: he directly concerns himself with the issue of Job's suffering and how, or indeed if, it can be understood in the light of a loving God. He quickly broadens his approach to incorporate consideration of contemporary cases of hardship alongside Job's case. Atkinson's exposition is based on studies that were initially presented at Bible reading sessions during morning worship at Wycliffe Hall Chapel in Oxford, UK.

McGee commentates on the book of Job as part of his "Thru the Bible" radio series, first aired in 1967, which addressed every book of the Bible. Necessarily, therefore, it was not realistically possible for McGee to delve deeply into an analysis of Job, indeed his intentions were to make the drama accessible to the common man, or, as he writes in his own words: "to put the cookies on the bottom shelf so that the kiddies could get them."

¹¹ McGee seems quite hard on Job. He stresses the flaws of defensive self-justification to which Job's circumstances, compounded by his friends' accusations, drive him. He describes Job as "very egotistical about his own righteousness," displaying "self-adulation" and "spiritual egotism," and concludes: "He is about to break his arm, patting himself on the back."¹²

¹¹ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*, v

¹² *Ibid*, x, 144, 152

By contrast, Balchin's work puts out an explicit call for sympathetic understanding to be shown to the man Job amidst his afflictions, a thought which he extends into his work's title: "Sitting with Job," the same title as an earlier work by Zuck.¹³ Balchin references a large library in his analysis and his work is characterized by a threefold presentation of his ideas: first his thesis, followed by a separate section of detailed notes supporting that thesis; followed by a third section of excursus, considering the wider spectrum of opinion on the broader and oft-debated points. Balchin concludes, similarly to Glatzer, that God's revelation is a necessarily debilitating experience for man and drives him to a penitent state in dust and ashes.¹⁴

Baird works from a smaller library, restricting himself to analyses from his singular denomination. This smaller database allows him to present a comprehensive review of those works and his exposition is prefaced by some excellent common sense advice given to anyone intending to give serious thought to the book of Job, such as avoiding sweeping generalizations so as not to create caricatures out of the characters of the drama. Baird makes relatively few concrete assertions yet, as Balchin, he too believes that Job's proximate experience of his Maker left him feeling profoundly sorrowful.¹⁵

The works of Spongberg and Sargent are both shorter: Spongberg's intention was to provide a study aid from notes of a series of Bible study lectures he presented in Queensland, Australia; while Sargent's principal focus was the book of Ecclesiastes, alongside which he offered a relatively brief consideration of Job. Both these works were published in the 1960s and are written in the admirable style of ones viewing themselves as students of the Biblical texts, not masters of them. I am grateful for their exhortation on this point, extolling as it

¹³ R. B. Zuck, "Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job," 1991, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA

¹⁴ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 112

¹⁵ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 304

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does the logical truth that a man who claims knowledge cannot experience revelation.

Despite the breadth of literature, I find that my study of Job still offers a different interpretation on a number of vital points. The most important difference is the identification of Satan, where my reading dramatically affects the understanding of the remaining plot and enables unique interpretations, such as the relevance of the debate and the illumination of the goodness of God's work with humanity; which both seem diminished using other interpretations of Satan. A table is given in the appendix at the end of this book which provides an "at a glance" view of the key characters and events of the book as seen in this work and the interpretations of the authors detailed above.

The Central Theme of Job

After reading many expositions I'm keenly aware that many themes can be adequately expressed as central in this drama, and the breadth of suggestions in the literature was more extensive than I anticipated.

Sargent presents a profound, yet curiously neutral, opinion of the book's theme: naming it the revelation of a man's encounter with God.¹⁶ Balchin sees the central theme as a discourse addressing the connections, or lack of connections, between sin and suffering.¹⁷ Atkinson identifies the central theme of Job more emotionally, as a treatise to assist coping with suffering,¹⁸ while Gutierrez reaches deeper to suggest it is the need to speak well of God in the presence of the suffering innocent.¹⁹ Luke, writing in the preface of Baird's work, sees Job's central education as perceiving the contrast between the

¹⁶ L. G. Sargent, "Ecclesiastes and Other Studies," 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK, 106

¹⁷ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswiol Books, Oswestry, UK, 20

¹⁸ D. Atkinson, "The Message of Job," 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 9

¹⁹ G. Gutierrez, "On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent," 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, xviii

vanity of man and the righteousness of God;²⁰ and similarly Spongberg identifies the central Joban tenet as the problem of evil when viewed relative to God's righteousness.²¹ McGee observes the most didactic tone of those reviewed here; for him the main message of Job is that all men, even the righteous, need to repent before God.²²

If I had been asked for my opinion on the central theme of Job any time before the turn of the millennium I would likely have replied: "Understanding the presence of a loving God, even in the face of extreme suffering." After my study in this book intensified in the years 2003-2007, I was particularly drawn to the fact that the episode provided the salvation of the three erstwhile accusers of Job, and my opinion of the central theme evolved accordingly into a more Messianic tone: "The suffering of a righteous man brought salvation to unrighteous men" a theme I still feel is highly relevant. Yet now after completing the necessarily more intense level of study which publication of one's thoughts demands, I refine my opinion further, seeing the central theme perhaps with most similarity to Gutierrez, as: "To speak well of God, because He caused the suffering of a righteous man to bring salvation to unrighteous men." That said, I in no way seek to disqualify any of the preceding opinions of other authors, all of which themes are strongly apparent. I offer thinking as to why I see speaking well of God as the central theme of Job in the following chapter, which opens the main body of this exposition.

What is particularly exciting to me is that this different interpretation eliminates the need to be defensive concerning the book of Job: I find myself enabled to see a God who is operating in a praiseworthy way throughout the unfolding events of the drama. Nor do I feel the exposition falls short in presenting God as 'merely' supreme, but actually as a *loving* Father. These facets of

²⁰ D. Baird, "The Education of Job," 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 5

²¹ E. M. Spongberg, "The Book of Job," 1965, private publication, iv

²² J. V. McGee, "Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job," 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, viii

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this interpretation can potentially provide considerable comfort and encouragement to those who are confused, troubled or even outright disturbed at the events they encounter in the book of Job. Even if this comfort and encouragement for those discouraged by the book of Job were the only result of this study, I would believe it enough to justify the writing. But, beyond this, I find this exposition has a better treasure to offer: objective evidence, from the book of Job, no less, To Speak Well of God.

theology:
from *theologos* “one discoursing on the
gods,” from Gk. ‘Theos,’ God
and ‘logos,’ word

Chapter 1

To Speak Well of God?

To Speak Well of God

- 1.1 Characters in the Book of Job Speaking about God**
- 1.2 Expositors of the Book of Job Speaking about God**
- 1.3 Job Speaking about God**

To Speak Well of God?

I identify the central theme of Job as a lesson in speaking well of God, as He invariably finds ways to invite us towards salvation. This observation necessarily includes the concept of suffering, too, because how we *truly* speak of God is only revealed under duress and not during times of ease, when we might easily speak well of God, or indeed anything at all.

Partly my identification of this central theme comes from many readings and much meditation on the book. But there are also objective pointers in the text which may draw one to the same conclusion; I outline below what I see those to be.

1.1 Characters in the Book of Job Speaking about God

Both the first and last words spoken in the book are on the theme of how one speaks about God, neatly sandwiching the entire drama in the same encapsulated thought.

The first words spoken are by Job:

Early in the morning [Job] would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of [his children], thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. (1:5)

A number of interesting points arise from this verse, but for now I focus on only one: that the central motivator to Job's actions were how his children may have spoken, even privately in their hearts, about his God.

This theme is duplicated in the very last words spoken in the book, uttered by God Himself:

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” (42:7-8)

So the first and last spoken words of the book concern how one speaks about God. God even *repeats* the statement concerning how one speaks about Him, highlighting this singular theme even more distinctly.

The single testimony recorded from Job’s wife is on the same theme:

[Job’s] wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse²³ God and die!” (2:9)

One might wonder why the participation of Job’s wife is just one spoken phrase. Some infer that Job’s wife abandoned Job, but there is no evidence for this. Perhaps a more charitable interpretation is that the drama is not attempting to show Job’s

²³ This verse draws special attention from Hebrew scholars. A group of scribes known as the Sopherim, working as early as the 4th century B.C., apparently made a series of changes to the text out of supposed reverence for God. One of these is Job 2:9, where they changed “Curse God and die” to “Bless God and die,” which the Hebrew text contains to this day. [The Hebrew word in 2:9 is ‘barak,’ meaning ‘bless’ (J. Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version,” in “Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance,” 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 24).] This is one of the so-called “Emendations of the Sopherim,” which were preserved by the later Masoretic stewards of the texts. I am not qualified to assess the validity of the alleged emendations so I adopt the protocol favored by nearly all the translators, of overturning the Sopherim’s alteration and using the English phrase “Curse God and die” to reflect what the original Hebrew text is believed to have recorded.

wife as wicked (after all, would a righteous and blameless man like Job have chosen a life partner so poorly?) but that this comment was the one contribution she made to the theme of how one speaks about God.²⁴

One fascinating consequence of seeing the central theme of Job as how one speaks about God, is that this classifies the book of Job, *literally*, as ‘theology.’²⁵ Theology is the words we use to speak about God. Job is often termed one of the ‘wisdom’ books of the Bible, and I have no disagreement with that classification. This helps my appreciation of what the fundamental essence of wisdom is: wisdom speaks well of God, as Job did. Sometimes as theological students we can get distracted by our pursuit of formulating correct doctrine (itself a worthy venture). But this can enable us falling into the trap of focusing on speaking well about *ourselves* because we feel we have correct doctrine (I fear this happens in my own denomination) and losing sight of the true central issue of theology, which is speaking well of God.

1.2 Expositors of the Book of Job Speaking about God

There is massive irony in identifying “speaking well of God” as the central theme in Job. Job is the book of the Bible, more so than any other, that prompts readers to speak ill of Him!

²⁴ As for her comment, I believe she is not articulating a desire to forsake God so much as desperately seeking any form of release, albeit an unwisely chosen one, for the husband she loves. I believe she spoke, likely in a high state of emotion, of her love for Job, even in excess of her commitment to God. This is not a common view, but I believe this is where emotionally remote ‘armchair analysis’ of her commentary naturally leads to a condemnation of her, where a more empathetic view might not. Even if her hyperbole was not wise, and it was not, I believe her comment was made from a strong sense of loyalty to Job, and her own intense empathetic pain at his condition.

²⁵ The Greek for ‘God’ is Θεός (Theos) and for ‘word’ is λόγος (logos), giving rise to the English word ‘theology.’

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Even the expositors who report their findings after diligent study, rather than cursory reading, often find themselves energized to speak against God rather than for Him. Many non-Christian expositors seem to revel in the opportunity to use the book of Job as an opportunity to speak ill of the Biblical God. Since the template of three counselors comes to the fore in the drama, I'll present three humanist scholars' considered opinions of the God they observe in the book of Job.

First: Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the famous Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist. He declares the Joban drama demonstrates the moral superiority of man above God. He sees the arrangement between God and Satan in the prologue as God internally debating the character of Job because He genuinely doubts Job's integrity, concluding:

“The reason He doubts Job is because He projects His own unfaithfulness upon a scapegoat.”²⁶

Similarly, Gilbert Murray (1866-1957), an English scholar renowned for his critique of classic literature, describes the opening contract in this way:

“The book begins with a mythological setting in which the story is represented as the result of a sort of bet upon the part of Satan that, though Job while prosperous is perfectly pious, he can be made to ‘curse God’ if he is sufficiently tormented and afflicted. The Almighty enters into the spirit of this atrocious proposal, and every type of torment is showered upon the innocent man. It is like torturing your faithful dog to see if you can make him bite you.”²⁷

²⁶ C. G. Jung, “Answer to Job,” 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, “The Dimensions of Job,” 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 46

²⁷ G. Murray, “Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy,” 1960, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 195

Finally, the American humanist philosopher Paul Weiss (1901-2002) openly rants against the whole plotline and the nature of the God he sees therein:

“In outline the story is rather simple. A childishly conceived God, a childlike God in fact, boasts about Job to His angel Satan as a child might about a dog... With a callousness, with a brutality, with a violence hard to equal in any literature, secular or divine, God, just to make a petulant point, proceeds to do almost everything the most villainous of beings could want... The inhumanity of the author (or of his God, if one prefers) has been almost matched by the insensitivity of those commentators who accept the prologue of the book of Job and do not feel a need to underscore an abhorrence of God’s project and performance.”²⁸

Thus speak this triumvirate of celebrated thinkers and, while a disciple might be tempted to bristle at their invective, they are inevitable human reactions broaching powerful challenges which any sincere expositor of Job must honestly address.

Even the Christian expositors struggle to speak well of God in their appraisals of Job. They find it trivially easy to speak of God’s supremacy and might; for obvious reasons since the story of Job well demonstrates the totality of control God can have in a human life. But is that the best we can do? Will the evidence in the book of Job truly allow us no better? I do feel a tinge of concern when the book – and in particular God’s speeches – are seen as solely demonstrating God’s superiority over man, rather than His care for him. Few expositors go beyond this level, at least from the text in Job. Many offer kinder thoughts on God once they incorporate the New Testament scriptures into their analysis. Baird manages to offer the defensive support of God: “It is not that God hates Job. On the contrary,

²⁸ P. Weiss, “God, Job and Evil,” 1948, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 182-183

God cares for all, including Job.”²⁹ And Balchin describes God as a conditional friend: “A Friend [to Job]? Certainly. And a friend to us too, if like the ultimate Job we confess our ignorance of His ways and rest instead in faith in His mercy.”³⁰

But these hardly seem to form a pinnacle of praise; nor does either author couple their statement with any explicit evidence of God’s asserted care or friendship. Should we conclude that, in all honesty, the text of Job does not give us sufficient reason to praise God? Or perhaps that to speak of His power is enough?

If we can go no further than to speak of God’s omnipotence and supremacy, do we really speak well of God? God presents Himself in scripture most commonly as a Father, which prompts those who are parents to consider by experiential comparison. Which father would be happy if the kindest thing any of his children ever said about him was merely that he was the one in power? A comment like: “My dad’s word is law in the family. What he says for us children goes.” This may reflect appropriate deference, but if the comments that the father received during the lifespan of his children never rose higher than this, would he truly be happy? And if not, why do we expect our Father to be pleased if we can say no better?

I find that the central plotline of the drama is one which enables us quite readily to speak well of God, without wresting the text, introducing extraneous ideas, or downplaying the intensity of Job’s suffering. We will see God acting in a caring manner throughout, even though the price of Satan’s sin, exacted from the righteous man, is severe. God has a Supreme plan underway which all characters, and the careful observer, will ultimately applaud.

²⁹ D. Baird, “The Education of Job,” 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 276

³⁰ J. Balchin, “Sitting with Job,” 1998, Rhoswiol Books, Oswestry, UK, 116

1.3 Job Speaking about God

In contrast to so many who simply *read* of Job's hardships, Job himself, who had to actually endure them, manages to speak that which is right about God. We're prompted to wonder: what exactly was that? Perhaps already we can identify key features.

1 Job's God is inscrutable, Job did not proclaim he had all the answers.

“But if I go to the east, he is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.
When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of
him.
But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”
(23:8-10)

Job's God is unfathomable, yet Job also trusts he will not deliver injustice (although we will need to add caveats to that later).

By contrast the three counselors, whose pride I will suggest forms the literary character of Satan, have a reducible, predictable God whom they can confine according to their theology. As a result they see themselves as in a position to impart wisdom, not receive it.

Eliphaz the Temanite:

“I myself have seen a fool taking root,
but suddenly his house was cursed.
His children are far from safety,
crushed in court without a defender...

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We have examined this, and it is true.
So hear it and apply it to yourself.” (5:3-4,27)

Bildad the Shuhite:

“When your children sinned against him,
he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.”
(8:4)

Zophar the Naamathite:

“If you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,
You will be secure, because there is hope;
you will look about you and take your rest in
safety.” (11:14,18)

Job had questions about God; the three friends asserted they had all the answers. The inscrutability of God is actually a necessity to a genuine faith, for else we have simply brought God down from Heaven and made Him one of us, by proclaiming we know His will and understand all the mechanisms by which He will perform it. This God must fail, for he is only ourselves, and we have centuries of social and environmental evidence of how inadequate we are at governing this planet. Atkinson comments:

“There is an unhelpful decisiveness in some aspects of Christian faith which gets in the way of meeting God in depth. There is an attempt to have everything buttoned up and secure. There is a defensive need to be sure. The book of Job, instead, brings us face to face with the living God, and invites us to live in his light with all our logical gaps, untidy edges and struggling faith.”³¹

³¹ D. Atkinson, “The Message of Job,” 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 155

I study Job with genuine and unapologetic intention to gain as many answers as possible. But it is vital to retain appropriate humility. We remind ourselves that, if we actually believe in a “God,” then by definition not all of His qualities and strategies will fit inside our minds. To think we can ‘know God’ is the epitome of the beast of human pride (a beast which will figure prominently in the analysis which follows) and repeats the fundamental sin of Eden in grasping at equality with our Maker (Genesis 3:4-6).

2 Job spoke of gifts from God even at time of loss. Job was never so small-minded in the appreciation of his experience of God that the only things he remembered were those that had most recently occurred. Thus, even directly after the impact of the complete series of disasters that was brought upon him, he was able to reflect:

“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said. (2:10)

Amid the destruction of flocks and herds, the loss of life of his servants and even his children – even the complete debilitation of his own body, Job managed, from within the crumpled carnage of his life, to speak well of God.

The question is: shall we?

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“If I had not Job! It is impossible to describe ...what significance he has for me, and how manifold his significance is... I read this book as it were with my heart... You surely have read Job? Read him, read him over and over again ...because everything about him is so human.”

Soren Kierkegaard

Chapter 2

The Challenge of the Book of Job

- 2.1 The Interface of Theology and Experience**
- 2.2 The God of Personal Happiness**
- 2.3 Justice, Suffering and the Existence of God**
 - 2.3.1 The Influence of Experience and Expectation
 - 2.3.2 Is there Value in Suffering?
- 2.4 The Doctrine of Retribution**
 - 2.4.1 Consequences of the Doctrine of Retribution
 - 2.4.2 Errors with the Doctrine of Retribution
- 2.5 Discipleship in the Presence of Suffering
and Deferred Justice**
- 2.6 Conclusion**

The Challenge of the Book of Job

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the theological and philosophical issues of justice and suffering, to arm us with the necessary tools to approach the issues raised by the book of Job. Exposition of the text of Job does not continue until the next chapter. This chapter may prove heavy going, especially if philosophy is not to your taste, but I feel it lays essential groundwork for the scriptural account. Without it we may be prompted to set off in the wrong direction in our consideration of Job.

Our task in this chapter is to explore how we can understand what the true essence of suffering is and what value it may bring. I believe there are a number of circumstantial factors which influence how we define suffering and they need to be gently massaged out before we are left with a sense of what true suffering is. We will find on the way that we also need to explore the concept of what ‘justice’ is – simply because our concept of justice is closely linked to the philosophies which prompt us to define events as ‘suffering’ or ‘blessing.’

2.1 The Interface of Theology and Experience

We know what we believe; we also know what happens in our lives. Yet sometimes those two crash head on. Some of us believe in a loving and caring God. We see a potential disaster looming, perhaps in the declining health of a loved one; so we appeal in fervent prayer. The prayer is seemingly ignored, or at least denied, and the loved one dies. In situations like these, the

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tenets of the faith we profess so deeply can seem rudely contradicted by the physical evidence before our eyes.

I define situations such as these as the interface between theology and experience. It is not a smooth and frictionless boundary, where the events of our lives glide effortlessly across the molded surface of our theology like water down a plastic slide. It is a heated, fractious interface where two implacable materials revolve at high speed and are brought into vital and cataclysmic proximity; where sparks of naked emotion spit out and our perceptions of the world are forged. It's real life at its most raw and challenging. And there is no book of the Bible which portrays this interface more keenly and agonizingly than the book of Job.

Job chapter 24 lends an excellent insight into the direct clash between Job's theology and reality. Job does not confine his words to his experiences, but speaks about the global injustices he perceives.

On the one hand his theology argues the wicked man cannot prosper:

“But God drags away the mighty by his power;
though they become established, they have no
assurance of life.
He may let them rest in a feeling of security,
but his eyes are on their ways.
For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone;
they are brought low and gathered up like all
others;
they are cut off like heads of grain.
If this is not so, who can prove me false
and reduce my words to nothing?” (24:22-25)

But on the other hand the experiences that surround him strongly suggest his theology is invalid:

“Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment?
Why must those who know him look in vain for
such days?
Men move boundary stones;
they pasture flocks they have stolen.
They drive away the orphan’s donkey
and take the widow’s ox in pledge.
They thrust the needy from the path
and force all the poor of the land into hiding.
Like wild donkeys in the desert,
the poor go about their labor of foraging food;
the wasteland provides food for their children.
They gather fodder in the fields
and glean in the vineyards of the wicked.
Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked;
they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold.
They are drenched by mountain rains
and hug the rocks for lack of shelter.
The fatherless child is snatched from the breast;
the infant of the poor is seized for a debt.
Lacking clothes, they go about naked;
they carry the sheaves, but still go hungry.
They crush olives among the terraces;
they tread the winepresses, yet suffer thirst.
The groans of the dying rise from the city,
and the souls of the wounded cry out for help.
But God charges no one with wrongdoing.”
(24:1-12)

Job’s own experiences corroborate, if not outright supersede, these observations. A messenger reports to him that a Sabean raiding party has captured his ox and donkey herds and murdered the servants watching them. While Job digests this serious news a second messenger arrives to report that the “fire of God” (lightning? volcanic lava? even a meteor?) has consumed

his sheep and shepherds and, before he has yet completed his report, a third is hard on his heels to report that the Chaldeans have stolen his camel herds and murdered the servants watching them. While Job reels from these triple blows, there arrives the last, fateful, messenger who bears the darkest news of all: a mighty wind has caused the collapse of a house, claiming the lives of all of his ten children. Job is utterly bereft, in a way words will never capture. And with each curse arriving alternately from the actions of wicked men and from God, he is firmly convicted that both man and God have conspired against him.

Events like these prompt the raw question: “How can a loving Father allow the abuse of the innocent, or even treat his faithful disciple Job in the way that He does?” This question is rooted in the heart more than the head. It rages against the heavens much more than it formulates a philosophical difficulty in need of rational analysis. Glatzer was particularly moved by this. After reviewing the extensive library of written opinion on Job he had compiled, he was disappointed, arguably even scornful, of expositions which he felt papered over the cracks of this raw issue with eloquent language. He felt this challenging conundrum was often dodged, for fear of describing a God whose character did not harmonize with palatable images of a loving Father.

“In reviewing the major trends in the entire range of literature on the book of Job, one cannot fail to notice that, with some notable exceptions, Jewish interpreters in the premodern period Judaized Job and Christian expositors Christianized him. Both sides, again with exceptions, avoided a direct confrontation with the text of the book, in order not to be exposed (or not to expose the pious reader) to the bluntness of the hero’s speeches and the shattering self-revelation of God in His answer to Job. The heritage of faith and the belief in a benevolent, providential deity were too strong to admit a position so

greatly at variance with the accepted basic religious attitudes. The book's frame, the folk tale, offered an escape clause. By concentrating on the story of the patient, *saintly* Job, the reader could absorb the shock of the drama of the impatient, *rebellious* hero; he could 'interpret' the latter in the light of the former.

Whatever difficulties the text still presented in this process of adaptation could be taken care of, reduced, or eliminated by skilful exegesis.”³²

I believe the core of Glatzer's complaint is valid. The events we see befalling Job are shocking to those who empathize appropriately. I shall endeavor not to dodge the major issues raised by the book, which I understand to be:

- How does one justify God, as any disciple might desire to do, while honestly confronting the fact that it looks like He tortured His disciple Job?
- Is Job really righteous and blameless, when he rants against the heavens and claims that God has wronged him (19:6)? Can we conduct our discipleships in this way and be blameless?
- What is justice? Does our sinfulness disqualify us from ever requesting it?
- Does God ever give Job any fair or useful answer to his questions? Does Job ever get to learn why he suffered so? Do we?

I shall not devolve into a purely dispassionate exposition of Job, tiptoeing around the drama's emotional furnace for fear of the heat; that would be a total travesty. To offer a solely intellectual exegesis of the book of Job is to perpetrate something of a fraud. Claudel calls the book of Job: “the most sublime, the most poignant, the most daring, and, at the same time, the most

³² N. N. Glatzer, “The Dimensions of Job,” 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 11

enigmatic, disappointing and... the most offensive.”³³ Even those offended by the book of Job, such as Murray, still do not deny its value: “Its dramatic form, as well as its philosophical substance, is without parallel in our remains of Hebrew literature.”³⁴ It is essential to remain sensitive to these genuine emotional reactions both within, and to, the drama’s plotline. Claudel’s disappointment with the book of Job arose because he, like almost every other expositor, believed God never did answer Job’s concerns. I will contend God gave a meaningful and relevant answer to Job, which Job understood and from which he greatly benefited.

Through raising these universal questions, Job forms a metaphor for the universal human experience, as expositors commonly observe.^{35,36,37} But we must be careful how we see the universality of Job. Job might represent universality in a human situation, but Job is not common, not common at all. Job’s trials require him to confront the interface of theology and experience and in that sense we can readily identify with him, because we are all tested this way. Through the divine Eye of scripture, we can glean insight into these universal questions about a loving God in the presence of human suffering. But the presentation of the man Job is the distillation of human blamelessness and obedience who is chafed and scarred through trials of almost unique severity. In the sense both of the harshness of his experience and the blamelessness of his soul he is most definitely *not* a corollary of the common man. In this sense, a man like Job is, in fact, very, very rare! So Job is every man and yet no man.

³³ P. Claudel, “Le Livre de Job,” in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 43

³⁴ G. Murray, “Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy,” 1960, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 195

³⁵ G. Gutierrez, “On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 1

³⁶ N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 1

³⁷ A. de Lamartine, “Cours familier de littérature,” English translation, 1956, Paris, France, 441

I do not, as some, extend the observation of the idealization of Job's presentation to suggest that Job never existed in actuality, or that his story has been exaggerated out of reasonable proportion.^{38,39} While the supposition of Job as a parable changes nothing in intellectual analysis, emotively it utterly destroys the power of the book.

Several authors liken Job to Prometheus, from Greek legend.^{40,41,42} I feel this is a shallow and one-dimensional connection, based simply on the fact that Prometheus suffers physically under a decree from (Greek mythology's construction of) heaven. I see no other meaningful connections that can be made between the accounts of Prometheus and Job; and the number of profound and fundamental differences between the two dramas severely limits the value of the singular apparent connection. In fact even the single connection is more false than true. Prometheus was punished, by Zeus, for Zeus' belief that Prometheus had stolen from him. By contrast the Biblical text emphasizes from the outset that the reader must understand Job is not suffering because of any wrongdoing. So the foundation stone of the Joban plotline, that of apparently unwarranted suffering, is completely different from the suffering encountered in the Greek myth.

But the questions listed above still raise serious issues. Anyone convicted of a Christian theology would concede we are all intrinsically guilty of violating God's code of blameless conduct. From this position, can we ever rail against God? Is that equivalent to the murderer on death row complaining because his coffee is cold? Yet on the other hand, even if we are guilty of death, must we quietly bear every hardship? Just because we are incomparably guilty, is it impossible for us to be abused? These

³⁸ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, xii

³⁹ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswiell Books, Oswestry, UK, 21

⁴⁰ J. Daniélou, "Holy Pagans of the Old Testament," 1957, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 101

⁴¹ L. Ragaz, "The Bible: An Interpretation," 1950, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 129

⁴² G. Murray, *Ibid*

are difficult questions! Job highlights the eternal problem: how can we dispense, or even reflect, justice from a position of constant need and guilt? Just what are we allowed to demand, if anything?

Beyond these theological questions, the book of Job also issues the stark challenge to every reader's life: "If this happened to you, would your faith remain intact? Would you cope?" The nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard articulated this powerfully:

"Or perhaps you believe that such a thing cannot happen to you? Who taught you this wisdom, or on what do you base your assurance? Are you wise and understanding, and is this your confidence? Job was a teacher of many... Are you powerful, is this your assurance of immunity? Job was revered by the people. Are riches your security? Job possessed the blessing of many lands. Are your friends your guarantors? Job was loved by everyone. Do you put your confidence in God? Job was the Lord's confidant. Have you reflected on these thoughts, or have you not rather avoided them, so that they might not extort from you a confession, which you now perhaps call a melancholy mood? And yet there is no hiding place in the wide world where troubles may not find you, and there has never lived a man who was able to say more than you can say that you do not know when sorrow will visit your house. So be sincere with yourself, fix your eyes upon Job; even though he terrifies you, it is not this he wishes, if you yourself do not wish it. You still could not wish, when you survey your life and think of its end, that you should have to confess, 'I was fortunate, not like other men; I have never suffered anything in the world, and I have let each day have its own sorrows, or rather bring me new joys.' Such a confession, even if it were true, you could still never wish to make, aye, it would

involve your own humiliation; for if you had been preserved from sorrow, as no other had, you would still say, 'I have indeed not been tested in it, but still my mind has frequently occupied itself seriously with the thought of Job, and with the idea that no man knows the time and the hour when the messengers will come to him, each one more terrifying than the last.'" ⁴³

In all ways therefore: as observer to disaster, disciple of God and potential victim of the disasters observed, the book of Job forces us to address this interface of theology and experience. Between these opposing forces is where we will learn, possibly by noble reflection, but more likely from bitter experience, how we will speak of our God.

2.2 The God of Personal Happiness

We've all heard, possibly even voiced, the plaintive cry: "How can there be a God?!" The cry is almost invariably triggered by a local disaster impacting the soul of the plaintiff. The emotion is understandable and we should empathize, mourning with those who mourn as the scriptures encourage us to do (Romans 12:15).

Yet is the cry itself credible? Is it reasonable to question the existence of God purely because we are hit with a circumstantial disaster? Human suffering certainly compels us to examine whether God is good, yet, I would say not. The goodness, or existence, of God cannot be a function of local circumstance or contentment. How often, even in jest, is the phrase "God is good!" triggered by some event of local circumstantial luxury? A man lands a new highly paying job, for example, and declares "God is great!" Conversely a woman's

⁴³ S. A. Kierkegaard, "Edifying Discourses," 1843, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 267-268

firstborn child dies and she rages: “There is no God!” If both events happen on consecutive days, what are we to conclude? That God is good one day and non-existent the next? Our personal circumstances cannot dictate the presence or character of the Creator. Indeed this conclusion should be straightforward because, with six billion humans on the planet, the temporal axis is necessarily populated with a continuum of thousands of simultaneous moments of personal agony and ecstasy. Since the nature of these events starkly contrast, they cannot teach any consistent faculty of the Almighty; or indeed anything besides revealing the starkly varying vicissitudes of life. God exists, or He does not. God is good, or He is not. But these matters are not determined by our perceptions of our experiences.

So why do these cries occur? What’s at the root of these intense convictions of either the goodness, or cruelty, of God, immediately subsequent to an impactful event in a human’s life?

I suggest what has happened is that the plaintiff has made his personal happiness into his God. Consider. What is the ‘proof,’ in these cases, that there is no God? The proof is that a man has witnessed an event which is displeasing to him, something which took away his happiness. His child died. He read of the outbreak of another war. He saw airliners flown into skyscrapers in New York. Either way, he witnessed something that was intensely saddening *to him*. His conclusion? There is no God. Yet in truth it is his happiness that has vanished, not his Creator.

On the other side of the coin, what is the evidence, in these same scenarios, that God is great? Is it not an event that causes the personal happiness of a man to enlarge?

In both cases therefore, of perceived affliction and perceived blessing, the cry only makes logical sense when the word ‘God’ is replaced by the term ‘personal happiness.’ Consider again the man who lands the new high-paying job. “My personal happiness is greatly enlarged!” would be an entirely logical expostulation. Conversely, on witnessing a disaster, or

some other event he finds morally or emotionally grotesque, he could proclaim: “Personal happiness is gone! There is none to be found!” Each of these cries makes good sense and we should empathize accordingly. I hypothesize that the reason these cases have been dragged into the theological arena, where they do not belong, is because it is a signature of our era that we have deified Personal Happiness. Hence contradictory cries of “God is good!” and “There is no God!” ring throughout our contemporary society, as the pinnacles and nadirs of personal contentment are navigated. Our personal happiness is now our God.

There are several consequences that follow from our creation of the God of Personal Happiness, beyond simply the common cries I mention above.⁴⁴

One consequence is that a person who has yet to dethrone personal happiness as his God can experience a total crash of faith as a result of any given tragedy. For example, Atkinson voices the question: “Can there even be belief in God after Auschwitz?”⁴⁵ If a man’s belief in the existence of God is truly hinged to the present condition that his family is healthy, or that he is relatively wealthy, or that humans will not commit social atrocities, then clearly he stakes his spiritual contentment on secular circumstances, which can change at any time. This is in itself a tragedy. This God will fail.

This may have been what occurred in the life of C. S. Lewis, as he witnessed his terminally ill wife decline and die. Lewis rages that religion cannot offer any consolation. Yet this is true *only on the condition* that personal happiness is God, because when sadness comes, this God dies. This is what leads me to

⁴⁴ The following arguments are based on the observation that God does not clear up every source of suffering we experience. I postulate this is for a variety of reasons; primarily because otherwise we would experience a utopian existence which we would falsely attribute to our own current governance of this world. We need to learn that our governance of this planet is actually a totally disastrous circumstance which would ultimately destroy everything, including ourselves.

⁴⁵ D. Atkinson, “The Message of Job,” 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 15

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suspect Lewis may also have deified his personal happiness, which God naturally disappeared upon his loss of Joy Gresham, his wife. As a tragic result Lewis discharges this uncharacteristically cynical and condescending commentary:

“Talk to me about the truth of religion and I’ll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I’ll listen submissively. But don’t come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don’t understand.”⁴⁶

A more global consequence of this doctrine is that we would then have God on a tether. As we stand at a hospital bedside we would be able to mandate: “My friend/spouse/child must live to prove You exist.” God is no longer a Deity, therefore, He is reduced to a Cosmic Slave. Only those of God’s plans which are comprehensible to human logic are permitted (by us) to be performed (by God). Thus, we become God. We sit on the throne of determination to decide which eventualities in the universe are right, proper and just, and we issue ‘prayers’ to the heavens that are little more than directives to instruct God what He must do next. Yet in reality, in God’s speeches to Job, (which we will enjoy in detail later), God shows us we can’t even tether His creation. How much less then, Him?

Even mortal survival is not a prerequisite of the goodness or existence of God. We must learn to decouple our theology from our experience for, as we have seen, the only alternative is that God is reduced to a Cosmic Slave who must do our bidding, keep our personal contentment levels high, in order to demonstrate He exists and pleases us enough for us to call Him good. Gutierrez struggled with this concept when observing poverty and imbalanced distribution of resources, from his standpoint in Ayacucho, Peru:

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, “A Grief Observed,” 1961, Zondervan reprint 2001, San Francisco, CA, USA, 25

“Human suffering, whatever its causes – social, personal or other – is a major question for theological reflection... in Latin America we are still experiencing every day the violation of human rights, murder, and the torture that we find so blameworthy in the Jewish holocaust of World War II...

How are we to speak of the God of life when cruel murder on a massive scale goes on in ‘the corner of the dead’?⁴⁷ How are we to preach the love of God amid such profound contempt for human life? How are we to proclaim the resurrection of the dead where death reigns, and especially the death of children, women, the poor, indigenes, and the ‘unimportant’ members of our society? These are our questions, and this is our challenge. Job shows us a way with his vigorous protest, his discovery of concrete commitment to the poor and all who suffer unjustly, his facing up to God, and his acknowledgement of the gratuitousness that characterizes God’s plan for human history.”⁴⁸

Gutierrez has spent time among those who are bereft of even the basic needs of human survival and safety. But with all deference to this heartfelt scenario, it strikes me how self-obsessed we are as a species. Why is human suffering considered less explicable than God? Why, in the understandably mystifying scenario of Job’s suffering, it is trivially easy to find men to sympathize with Job, but not with the actions of the Father they even acknowledge made us all?

Gutierrez’ descriptions of the Latin circumstances also highlight a principal consequence of suffering: it proves or disproves the validity of a man’s faith. It brings us to what I call the Challenge of Meaningless Theology:

⁴⁷ The city where Gutierrez lives and ministers: Ayacucho, is a Quechan word meaning: “the corner of the dead.”

⁴⁸ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 102

“If I cannot speak well of God when my circumstances are painful, does it really count for anything if I speak well of Him at any other time?”

Is it really valuable to profess a Christian faith when all in life is running smoothly, only to jettison it entirely when life turns painful? Is that a spiritual conviction of any meaningful value? If not, we must learn either to speak well of God irrespective of our circumstances, or to confess we never truly believed at all. Any fool can sail a boat on calm waters. And fascinatingly the Bible repeatedly chooses precisely this setting: a boat on stormy waters, as a template testing ground for faith (e.g. Jonah 1; Mark 4; Acts 27).

Nevertheless, we must not overlook the factual essence of suffering itself. There is clearly a pronounced asymmetry in the distribution of personal benefits throughout the world. Not just the trivialities of luxury, but also the base parameters of survival: food, shelter, seclusion from imminent physical danger. We're tempted to conclude, as Gutierrez does above, that this is unjust. But before we arrive at this conclusion, an important question awaits us.

What *is* justice?

2.3 Justice, Suffering and the Existence of God

Justice is not an absolute entity, like mass or energy; it only exists in a preconceived ideology. Let me explain what I mean. Depending on our very different assumptions of what is 'right' and 'wrong' we will be prompted to declare certain actions either 'just' or 'unjust.' So we are prompted to wonder, what are the various different types of ideology that cause us to perceive events as either 'just' or 'unjust'? Doubtless there is no single answer, for our perceptions of our surroundings are unique and

swayed to different extents by different influences. So, whatever we declare 'just' or 'unjust' is likely a revelation of the strategy of the ideology we employ, rather than being an objective comment on the inherent nature of the universe.

We are often prompted to utilize the word 'unjust' in the presence of perceived inequalities. Yet when the weakest gazelle is caught by the entire pride of hunting lionesses and torn to pieces, seldom are the words 'just' or 'unjust' applied. But there are clearly inequalities at play: both between the rapacious lions and the gazelle and between that weaker gazelle and the remainder of the herd; and it is the presence of inequalities which generally provokes us to start using the word 'unjust' in other scenarios.

I'm supposing that only when humans are involved do we bring preconceived ideologies into play. Again, this may simply reveal the bias with which we consider our species with so much greater care than another. In those cases we often apply the label 'unjust' without cognitive recognition that this arises only because we are observing inequalities *in the presence of a preconceived ideology*; otherwise we would also apply the label 'unjust' to many similar instances in the natural world. In terms of analyses of the book of Job, I am disappointed that so many expositors employ the words 'just' and 'unjust' without ever defining, or attempting to explore, the system on which their discriminations are based.

I want to develop understandings of the concepts of 'suffering' and 'justice' which are sympathetic to our experiences, but also inherently 'fair.' By 'fair' I mean those which allow us to speak of justice devoid of unnecessary influences of our own experiences, which might be colored by privilege or other unhelpful bias. This is relevant to our quest to understand suffering because our understanding of justice influences our use of the opposing terms 'suffering' and 'blessing.' 'Suffering' is sometimes associated with that which we feel is 'unjust,' where 'blessing' can be similarly applied to events exceeding our

expectations. So before we use these terms, it is essential for us to explore the influences which provoke their application.

2.3.1 The Influence of Experience and Expectation

One factor we should identify as a major contributor to our sense of justice is experience. When an event occurs that is more unpleasant than my previous circumstances in that same context, I might be mentally tempted to label that new event ‘bad,’ or ‘unjust,’ possibly even as ‘suffering.’ But my label is based on my previous experiences. My ‘average’ experience is the one by which my expectation level is set and I mark each new event according to which side of ‘average’ I perceive it to lie.

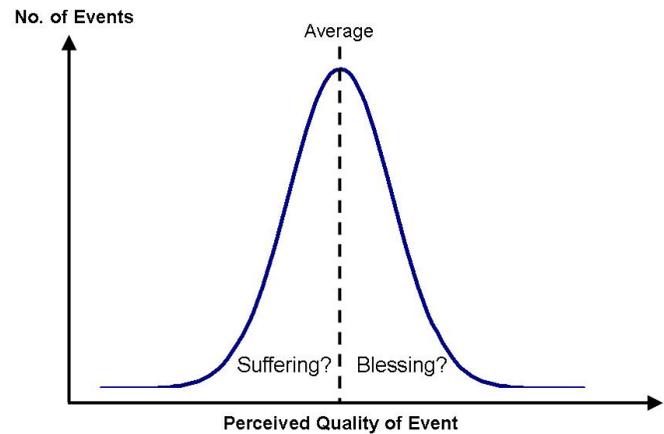


Figure 2_1: A graphical representation of how past experience can influence us to define an event as either ‘suffering’ or ‘blessing.’

Figure 2_1 indicates suffering and blessing can be inferred from a subjective experiential average. It is evidently philosophically inappropriate to define the left side of the distribution of circumstantial pleasure as either ‘suffering’ or ‘injustice.’ Justice cannot be a purely statistical measure; if it were, then as my experiences changed and the average line shifted, events I might have once deemed pleasurable might have to be

redefined as suffering. This would make no sense, because the event would already be emotionally tagged in my memory as a pleasurable experience. So we need to use a different form of analysis than just statistical variation if we're to be successful in our quest to understand what the true nature of suffering is.

If we've seldom experienced unpleasant events, they can seem like an 'injustice' when they arrive, simply because of their statistical rarity. For example, a medical bill for ~\$10 000 showed up unexpectedly in my mailbox recently. I could define that as something from which I 'suffered,' not only due to the unanticipated nature of its arrival, but also because I seldom encounter debts of that magnitude. But will this bill now impoverish me? Will I now have difficulty acquiring enough food to remain healthy or to pay for my continued lodging? No. So have I actually incurred genuine suffering from this bill, or is it merely an event of lower pleasure-quality than average? Surely the latter is true. (Furthermore, it would be clumsy, if not outright obnoxious, if I were to overlook that the medical procedures to which the bill related were successful in enhancing my perceived quality of life significantly; as they returned to me, if only partially and temporarily, the use of my right hand.)

I'm not trying to suggest that our sense of pain or injustice is influenced *only* from relation to past experience. Other factors also impinge. Another influential parameter is that of inherent personal comfort, the parameter which we considered above as having been deified by contemporary Western society. To take a relatively trivial example, 'bad' weather, almost anywhere around the world, is generally defined as weather where the temperature is further away than the average departure from that most comfortable to the human body. Imagine I schedule an outdoor event which is important to me, yet, when the day comes, the weather is unusually less conducive to human comfort than would be statistically anticipated. I'm tempted to declare two conclusions: that the weather is 'bad' and, perhaps further, that my scheduled event has received 'unfair' treatment.

Additionally, the axis in Figure 2_1 is necessarily marked *perceived* quality of event, and clearly this allows for much distortion, or at least interpretation, of the impinging event. When the reality of this remarkable universe is crammed through the bottleneck of human perception, all sorts of strange products are born! Ultimately the resulting emotion which accompanies our experience of an event is a product of the intrinsic features of that event convolved with an expectation function. The lower our expectations, the fewer events we identify as suffering.

All these influences, and likely others too, change our perceptions of how we use the global terms ‘blessing’ and ‘suffering,’ or even ‘provident’ and ‘unjust.’

It is also important to widen our perspective to include observations of the average events impacting all humanity, rather than just our own lives, so that we don’t end up living in a Marie-Antoinette style bubble; defining our sense of justice and suffering accordingly. It is particularly valuable for those in Westernized society to do this, simply because our lives can be so luxurious compared to those in other lands. Such consideration brings a humble reminder that circumstances we may be prompted to define as unfortunate can still be beyond the wildest dreams of some. I recall a scene from the movie “Gladiator,” where the Roman senators, dressed in fine white robes, were assembled in the splendid marbled senate. During an argument, one senator claimed the people of Rome were all adequately represented by the senators themselves, to which the new Emperor returned the cutting rejoinder:

“I doubt if any of the people eat so well as you, Gracchus. Or have such splendid mistresses, Gaius.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ D. Franzoni, “Gladiator,” 2000, Dir. R. Scott, Universal Pictures, Universal City, CA, USA

I'm not trying to suggest that those in Western society do not experience significant pain or suffering, even at the deepest levels. Bereavement, for example, seems an especially painful experience and its impact is not mitigated by one's average circumstances. The pain of death strikes prince and pauper alike. Nor am I trying to minimize, or somehow disqualify, the human reality of emotional pain. I am trying to filter out from our experiences of true suffering those circumstances which are erroneously labeled as suffering and injustice. When our average circumstances are more luxurious than other cultures, our perceptions of hardship can be overly sensitized. Hence I am advocating we should be cognizant of the influence of past experience, expectation and average standard of living, so that we might distil out from the spectrum of experiences we find unpleasant those which are merely events less luxurious than our personal average and leave behind only those true elements of suffering.

Why should we do this? The benefits are twofold:

- If we become convinced that we actually suffer less than we first imagined, this allows us to live happier, more enjoyable and more grateful lives.
- More importantly, the mind that is set free from looking inward at its own perceived suffering can engage in other activity, where one who is still entangled in his own perceived injustices cannot. For the disciple, this translates to an ability to be considerably more effective in perceiving and praising God and participating in the service of others.

An excellent example of this latter point is conveyed by the thief on the cross.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at [Jesus]: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God,"

he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Luke 23:39-42)

The worthy thief’s sense of justice was based on an objective sense of his own actions, not a self-centered perception of his circumstances. That allowed him to seem sanguine even in the face of an extremely brutal and prolonged execution measure. What I find most encouraging is that, having decoupled his extreme pain from his perception of justice and thereby reconciled his circumstance to one not warranting complaint, his mind was set free to pursue other matters. He used this freedom to give his incredibly profound confession of faith before his Master. In his one closing sentence, possibly the last words he ever spoke, he revealed his belief in resurrection (for he knew he would die) in the Kingdom of God, in Jesus as the appointed King, and in Jesus as the source of his salvation, the one who had the power to grant him entry into that Kingdom. One revelation seems to me the most powerful of all and is perhaps so obvious we may even miss it. He believed he could be forgiven. He illustrated his understanding of, and belief in, the grace of God instilled in the Christ. The Roman court he had just experienced had condemned him to a death sentence, showing him he could not be forgiven for his crime. The world of man does not forgive; it weighs and extracts payments for crimes perceived. But the thief was aware of a very different, and much more powerful, authority; an authority to which he desired to appeal. Not to appeal for justice, for he is aware that his situation is already just. He appeals for forgiveness. He knows himself as a thief, albeit one who has evidently recognized the wrongness of his former life. And he knows that, with forgiveness, he need not be excluded from the Kingdom of God.

What is critical is how the criteria he used to establish justice left his mind free to perceive the presence of the Master alongside. Without forming his sense of justice the way he did – and clearly it was based on neither the pleasure of personal circumstance nor his previous experiences, else the reality of his crucifixion would have screamed to him that he was a victim of injustice and great suffering – he would never have had the remaining mental attention to deliver his amazing confession of faith.

Ironically the failings that may exclude one from the Kingdom of God are seen in the same scene. The first thief has not apparently been able to reconcile his state as anything other than a situation in need of urgent redress. Being overcome by the unpleasant nature of his circumstances (his suffering) his thoughts are absorbed wholly in what can be done to change his immediate circumstances for the perceived better. He is evidently frustrated that one who may have the potential ability to ease his contemporary pain does not seem willing to do so and this provokes him to anger. (In this alone the thieves before Jesus strike a significant chord with Job's warring emotions before God.) This leaves him unable to ascribe any mental resources to actually seeking the Master. Being absorbed entirely in the effort to save his own life, he may, alas, have lost it.

A second example of a mind set free from perceived injustice to pursue discipleship comes in the dialogue between Jesus and the centurion he met in Capernaum, whose faithful servant is deathly ill. I find beauty in the neat contrast between the two mentions of “deserve” that appear in the passage.

The elders of the town, who are Jews, appeal to Jesus to help the Roman centurion by healing his servant, quoting the evident works of love the centurion has performed among God's people as justification for the Messiah's favor.

When [the Jewish elders] came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do

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this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” (Luke 7:4-5)

Yet the centurion declares:

“Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” (Luke 7:6)

The comparison with the thief on the cross is striking. The man who has set his mind free from the self-focus of his circumstances, because he is not distracted into thinking they are ‘unjust,’ (as evidenced by his declaration of being undeserving of the Master’s presence), is able to speak well of his God. Thus he delivers a confession so powerful that the Lord publicly announces it as evidence of the greatest faith he has encountered in Israel (Luke 7:9). The centurion testifies his belief in the unique authority of Jesus and belief that that authority was granted from Heaven:

“But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Luke 7:7-8)

These scriptural precedents teach we must shed any perceptions that our life’s circumstances are fundamentally unjust. Life itself: the visual, auditory and tactile interface with the universe, by which we can be constantly awed and amazed (if we are paying sufficient attention), arrives in the life of every individual completely unexpectedly and without any effort on the part of that individual. What can we ‘deserve’ in a universe that has been provided for free? Thus we should be able to rid our souls of a sense of injustice in our basic condition, whatever that may be. Any concept the Christian has of divine justice, of how God treats him, can only be viewed in the greater context that the

entire world exists as a gift of love from the Father. Gutierrez comments similarly: “God’s freedom finds expression in the gratuitousness of the divine love that refuses to be confined within a system of predictable rewards and punishments” and defines that divine gratuitousness as “the hinge on which the world turns and the definitive seal set upon it.”⁵⁰

Finally, we may also be prone to labeling situations as ‘suffering’ or ‘blessing’ based on *our* definition of functionality. It would be normal for us to describe eyes that cannot see, or legs that cannot walk, as dysfunctional. It is certainly true that they do not lend their owners the abilities most normally associated with those body-parts. But are they truly dysfunctional? The Bible asserts plainly this is not necessarily so; that God deliberately arranges some of these matters so that He can bring glory, sometimes even salvation, through their existence. It may be tempting to label a leg that won’t support bodyweight, or an ear that can’t hear, as an element of suffering, possibly even as a situation which is unjust. But we should pause before we make such ascriptions. For concerning how many of our perceived afflictions, or malfunctioning minds or bodies, might the Lord himself be saying: “this happened so that the work of God might be displayed”? (John 9:3).

Thus the disciple concludes that the concept of divine justice is dependent on faith in the accuracy of divine morality: that God does not mistreat us, even if He might arrange matters that are not immediately conducive to our personal comfort. The alternative is to decay back into a variant of the doctrine of the Cosmic Slave. God would then have do our bidding, set the world straight according to our myopic, astigmatic vision, and then and only then would we acknowledge that justice was served. But once again that would necessitate us taking occupation of the heavenly throne, making ourselves God: determining what is, and is not, tolerable in the world.

⁵⁰ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 80

Rather we must cease our constant activity in supervising, interfering and micromanaging the judicial governance of the universe: hardly an unreasonable suggestion since it is a role we cannot hope to comprehend, let alone perform. We must confine our activity to those tasks we can actually understand and to which our discipleships are directed.

Only then do we allow God to be God.

2.3.2 Is there Value in Suffering?

We have considered above that the label of ‘unjust suffering’ needs to be applied very carefully; indeed it is often misapplied due to our construction of an ideology of justice distorted through unreasonable expectation, past experience or misconstrued definitions of functionality. But even with that said, we haven’t identified any reasons why suffering should exist in any of our lives. We know some suffering is inevitable as a consequence of the ‘wear and tear’ of physiological fragility. We know some suffering God arranges for specific purposes He wishes to bring to bear. This latter line of thinking veers towards the general topic of “If there’s a God, why is there suffering?” I do not want to address the whole spectrum of that question in this analysis of Job. I am not ducking the question, and indeed have offered my thinking on this topic elsewhere.⁵¹ But for the purposes of considering the book of Job, I believe the relevant vein of this topic is: “Does suffering have any inherent value?”

As an unusual opener to this train of thinking, let’s remind ourselves that God Himself suffers.

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:6)

I think this observation gets us off to a good start in considering the subject of pain and suffering. If we don’t place

⁵¹ J. A. Pople, “If God Exists Why Does He Allow Suffering?” in “The Gospel of Your Salvation,” 2005, <http://one-gospel.org/mylife.htm>

this verse at the forefront of our attention it's easy to make the mistake of assuming that all pain and suffering comes *from* God, with the resulting analysis then likely to form the essentially misdirected inquiry of speculating why God brings it. This verse teaches us that God can feel pain. This may be a surprising revelation in itself, since we generally associate pain with weakness and potential mortality (albeit it is evidently an emotional pain that is referenced in Genesis 6, rather than a physical depreciation). But even then, since God can neither be killed nor weakened, we are required to view the subject of pain quite differently. An immortal, omnipotent being *can and does* experience pain.

The verse is further valuable because it is evident God's pain does not come from Himself. God may control all things, but we learn He does not initiate all things. We truly have free will and, being made in the image of the Creator (Genesis 1:26), it follows logically that we are ourselves creators. And with our free will, there are two contrasting things we can genuinely create in the universe: humble obedience and prideful self-service. These are truly our own creations: the first being one which God eagerly desires to see (Isaiah 66:1-2) and the latter being that which damages the world and even pains our Father; which in turn demonstrates He is able to sympathize directly with our painful experiences.

What benefits can we identify from experiencing a time of pain or suffering?

1 Pain teaches us tenderness; suffering assists with our development of sympathy. By nature we are self-focused creatures and sometimes unable to appreciate the intensity of feeling of a tough situation without first having been in that situation ourselves. Thus our own painful experiences teach us not to be glib when regarding another's pain, merely telling the sufferer to shrug it off and move forward. Rather we are

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educated to spend time alongside the one in pain and sit with him in the ashes, as Job's friends initially wisely did.

2 The deprivation of pleasure or function teaches us the value of that pleasure or function which has been lost. One has only to break an arm or a leg and be trapped in a cast for a short while to highlight experientially just how important, useful and enjoyable the use of that limb had been. Suffering is an effective process by which we understand the degree of functionality we had previously enjoyed; the more pleasurable when it is known that the ability will be restored and we learn thereafter not to take it for granted quite so much.

3 Unpopular suggestion though it may be, there are people in the world, and I need to confess myself as one, who become more God-focused in times of adversity than in times of pleasure. For such people, unfortunately, the advent of suffering assists in creating a more spiritually focused disciple. So God is not only justified, but wise, to utilize this faculty in shaping a disciple. As the author of Ecclesiastes, the one called The Preacher [Hebrew: Koheleth], commented:

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

(Ecclesiastes 7:2-4, KJV)

Conant expounds on the same theme, proposing specific components of spiritual enrichment which can result from suffering: "People have undergone a spiritual enrichment as a consequence of their sufferings, I would say, if they have become

less rebellious in their attitude toward the universe, less frightened of the future, more sympathetic toward other people.”

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4 The suffering of an individual may bring benefit to others. Not all the things we suffer are purely for our own learning or strengthening. And what a curious honor it is, to suffer for another, for in so doing we closely mirror the life of the Master! As we study the life of Job, we will find one of the most satisfying explanations for the reason of his intense suffering is that it brought his friends to salvation.

5 Suffering also insists the disciple addresses the interface between theology and experience. The Challenge of Meaningless Theology is truly applied and each person comes to discover experientially, for himself or herself, whether their own faith is meaningful; whether their trust in God is truly independent of the comfort of their circumstances (a concept sometimes referred to as: ‘disinterested religion’).

Affliction keenly affects both the one directly afflicted and the one who wishes to defend God in the presence of affliction. Immediately we see an integral part of the tragedy of Job: Job is both parties! He is both the one afflicted and the one who wishes to speak well of God in the presence of affliction. Thus Job’s faith is, ironically, going to prove part of his problem. If Job had believed God was callous or disinterested in mankind, it would be easy for him to reconcile his situation with the existence of God. Job’s problem is that he believes in a loving and just Father, which is why he can’t rationalize what is happening. He understandably wails at the destruction of his family and debilitation of his own health. Worse still, because he is surrounded by those who are firm advocates of the doctrine of

⁵² J. B. Conant, “Modern Science and Modern Man,” 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 248

retribution (a concept we explore immediately below) he suffers repeated assaults of false accusation from his colleagues, who can only interpret Job's situation as punishment. Worst of all, Job is drawn to suppose that his situation is an indication that he has been abandoned by his God. Yet despite all these persecutions, both real and imagined, he will not yield his faith and, throughout his suffering, he perseveres. He simply will not curse God and die.

2.4 The Doctrine of Retribution

The doctrine of retribution declares a man's good actions are invariably rewarded with temporal, material blessings and, symmetrically, his wicked deeds are invariably met with circumstantial punishment. The rewards and punishments are all believed to be proportional to the deeds committed and to arrive within the lifetime of the party concerned. (Sometimes this view is termed the doctrine of exact retribution, or the doctrine of temporal retribution.)

The allure of the belief system is obvious. It offers a salving placebo to the human psyche which cannot abide injustice, for the doctrine of retribution assures that there are no lasting injustices in the world: every sin is paid in full and every altruistic deed rewarded in full.

Common experience strongly testifies that the simplistic justice which the doctrine extols is simply not evidenced in real life. It's just not true to say: 'good things only happen to good people' and vice versa. Nevertheless, despite its evident fallacy, it remains a potent force, simply because of the powerful underlying human desire to see justice done. The doctrine of retribution generates the siren call to lure the clumsy, or lazy, philosopher into its trap. The belief is still alive and strongly prevalent to this very day, albeit 'karma' is the more broadly used name contemporarily for this age-old false doctrine. Through the

doctrine of karma, where positive energies invariably generate positive results for the individual and vice versa, we obtain the assurance that every wrong is righted and every good deed rewarded, so that we can go to sleep each evening knowing that all is right with the world, or very shortly will be; without any required prayer, solicitation or atonement on our part.

Despite being evidently false, the powerful, if latent, lure of this thinking is such that we can all fall victim to it. I can hear its siren-song in my own mind from time to time. For example, for the last few years I've been hooked up to an intravenous (IV) drip for several days each month to attempt to treat a degenerative nerve condition. For some odd reason, despite having near inch-wide veins that are visible from across the room, the nurse often has difficulty threading the catheter for the IV. The lament in broken English: "It disappear on me!" drifts across the scene and thence begins the hunt: the needle wanders internally in hope of puncturing the right feature. On the occasions when such explorations include abrading against nerves, the situation can be a little uncomfortable; and it's times such as these that the mind is beguiled into thinking that some sort of payment for sin must be underway. Indeed such are the vagaries of the human mind that I'm temporarily drawn to wonder if the Bible verse that speaks of atonement for sin through the shedding of blood might include the stuff dribbling down my arm when my nurse sets off on one of her more energetic vein-hunting safaris. I know it doesn't, all such alluring thoughts are entirely false, but it's strangely enlightening how the mind attempts to seduce one to its natural inclinations of justice and desert; as if our discomforts really should be recorded on a celestial scorecard somewhere and used to balance our misdeeds.

Of course, at the most trivial level, the doctrine of retribution is true. For example, if I conducted an experiment where I was obnoxiously rude to every stranger I encountered for a month, and then obsequiously charming to every stranger I encountered for the next month, obviously my reciprocal

experiences would strongly contrast. Clearly the people to whom I was rude would be more likely to be brusque in response, whereas those whom I flattered would more likely respond with positive emotions. At this most simplistic analysis of surface interaction in the world, the belief of karma holds good.

Interestingly, the concept of retribution holds equally good at the most far-reaching level of Christian theology. In the fullness of time, at the end of days, justice will indeed be meted: “For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (Acts 17:31). One major caveat is that the justice served will be divine justice, which does not always comply with our own sense of right and wrong. For example, I’ve heard the opinion voiced that under no circumstances should a rapist ever be forgiven; yet the Bible attests to a broader grace. Nonetheless, given the scriptural promise of a day of reckoning, the Christian is therefore especially susceptible to belief in karma, or in the doctrine of retribution, having seen it in the Bible at least in the context of ultimate judgment.

Given that the doctrine of retribution seems functional on both the most trivial level and the most far-reaching level, it is tempting to suspect it is true at all levels. But this is not so. In fact at the most meaningful level of contemporary human existence: our mortal lifespan, the doctrine is simply not in effect, as simple experience will ratify. We will explore reasons for why that should be below.

Most relevantly for the book of Job, the doctrine of retribution is the central thesis of the three friends; the principal reasoning from which they draw their conclusions. In fact Job becomes part victim to this view himself, for he is vulnerable to interpreting his condition as punishment, which is indicative that he supposes his circumstances are the results of God’s perceptions of his actions. This leads to further error, as he is drawn to further suppose that such punishment must be unjust, by reason of his innocence.

2.4.1 Consequences of the Doctrine of Retribution

1 One price which the doctrine of retribution exacts from society is the requirement to look with scorn upon any who are suffering; for the doctrine assures us that they do so because of their evil conduct. This is exactly what happens to Job. A secular example is seen in the remarks of the Hollywood actress, Sharon Stone, in 2008. Upon hearing of the earthquake in China that left tens of thousands dead, she invoked the doctrine of retribution to add very genuine insult to the very genuine injuries of the Chinese populace, by saying:

“I thought, ‘Is that karma?’ When you are not nice, bad things happen to you.”⁵³

Taking this thinking to its logical conclusion, the Christian who believes in the doctrine of exact retribution is required to despise Jesus of Nazareth. Since his suffering during his mortal discipleship was very great, including a brutal flogging and painful execution in the manner of an especially despised criminal, the doctrine of retribution necessarily requires that Jesus be viewed as a man of considerable wickedness. Moreover Jesus, unlike Job, did not even receive any restoration during his mortal life, which certifies his condemnation by the doctrine of retribution. This alone should enable every Christian who may have been beguiled into believing the doctrine to repudiate it swiftly.

2 A disastrous additional factor that exacerbates the problems of the doctrine of retribution is that nearly everyone considers himself or herself to be a good person. When this belief is combined with the doctrine of retribution, the result is that the individual necessarily believes he is *deserving* of providential things

⁵³ S. Stone, “Anger over star’s quake remarks,” 28 May 2008, BBC News online article, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

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happening in his life. If ever there were a false belief system guaranteed to bring heartache and disenchantment, surely this is the one!

The testimony of José Ramos-Horta, the president of East Timor and once Nobel Peace Prize winner, illustrates the point. In February 2008 he fell victim to assassins and was gunned down outside his house on the island. He survived the encounter, just barely, and later wrote from exile in nearby Australia, that his survival was principally due to his having *earned* the right to live.

“It was not until I was delivered into the hands of doctors that I lost consciousness. Even then, in that dream state between consciousness and unconsciousness, I had vivid images. I felt that I was surrounded by a group of people, people were trying to force the remaining life from me. I was trying to ask them why, what I had done to deserve this. ‘At least,’ I said, ‘tell me what I’ve done wrong.’

A thundering voice interrupted them, saying: ‘Leave him alone. He’s done nothing wrong.’ Suddenly the others left.

I am not one to try and explain such occurrences. But I believe that at that point, I returned to life. And I believe that, while the doctors in East Timor, and in Darwin, Australia, were unquestionably critical to saving my life, I was also blessed by God. It seems that I was given a second chance.”⁵⁴

Ramos-Horta does not attempt to explain the source of his experience; although I note visions like these are most frequently reported at times where the individual is experiencing reduced oxygen delivery to the brain (in this case from extensive

⁵⁴ J. Ramos-Horta in “Commentary: How would-be assassin’s bullets changed me,” 14 Apr 2008, CNN online news article, <http://cnn.com/>

blood loss); and I conjecture what is being experienced are simply thoughts already locally resident in the mind. But that to one side, what is interesting is the kernel of the message, essentially: “I *deserve* to live”: the invariable by-product of believing in one’s inherent goodness combined with the doctrine of retribution. This observation is corroborated by noting that, upon conscious recovery, Ramos-Horta finds nothing inappropriate, or even surprising, with the message he recounts of *deserving* to live. Yet the thundering voice delivering this attractive verdict is hardly from God, since the Bible expressly denotes that all of us who sin are in fact deserving of death. We receive life as the Almighty’s gift of love, not something that our self-perception of goodness earns us.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:20)

In fact even the atheist would concur that the solely reliable consequence of mortal existence is nothing other than mortal expiry. There is no logical ‘right’ to life, for coming to life was never an activity initiated by the explicit control or choice of the living individual.

Nor is it only Nobel Peace Prize winners, who might have among the best secular claims, who are convinced they are good people. Many is the time I have witnessed in the media that, despite the murder or armed robbery of which a man has just been convicted, or the internet sex-predator sting in which he has just been ensnared, the individual still ardently professes his unshaken belief that, essentially, at the core, he is a ‘good’ person and he knows everything will therefore ultimately work out to his personal benefit.

Such are the consequences of human self-assessment combined with the doctrine of retribution.

2.4.2 Errors with the Doctrine of Retribution

By observing scripture we are able to identify the two philosophical errors with the doctrine of retribution, even aside from the implied requirement to condemn Christ, which we considered above. I consider these errors in the context in which we meet them in the book of Job; as the three friends lean on the doctrine of retribution as the bulwark of their critique of Job.

1 The doctrine of retribution fails to acknowledge that affliction may come from any other source than divine punishment. This is a grave error of logic; Job's three friends fail to deduce that arguments are not necessarily reversible. Just because penguins are black and white does not mean everything black and white is a penguin. Likewise, just because divine punishment can take the form of contemporary affliction, this does not mean that all contemporary affliction is divine punishment. The Preacher articulately testifies to the experiences in life which arise from purely random distributions of blessing and, by extension, suffering:

I returned and saw under the sun that-
The race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favor to men of skill;
But time and chance happen to them all.
(Ecclesiastes 9:11, NKJV)

2 The doctrine of retribution attempts to apply divine justice over an inappropriately short timescale; and so the three friends are convinced they must be seeing the outworking of divine justice before their eyes in the mangled life of Job. The basis of their belief starts correctly with the assertion that God will practice justice, tempered with mercy (e.g. Hebrews 11). But

they miss the vital point that the reckoning comes on God's timescale; which may be immediate (e.g. the case of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11) or eternal. The writer to the Hebrews explains that the doctrine of retribution is only proven true in the ultimate sense (else the Day of Judgment would be unnecessary):

“These [righteous disciples] were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”
(Hebrews 11:39-40)

It is no coincidence that the central thesis of the chapter from which this quote is taken is the incomparable importance of faith. Faith is the only means by which the disciple can grasp justice, precisely because the Bible assures us we will not necessarily see it in our lifetime, and cites the cases above as examples of those who did not. The righteous shall live by faith, says the prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 2:4), and this reasoning indicates precisely why this must be so. Justice has been deferred, and those who believe that God is a God of justice must do so without necessarily seeing the evidence of enacted justice in their lifetime.

It may be no coincidence, therefore, that Hebrews 11 indicates that it was those most faithful who were unrewarded. God knew that with their superior faith they could be recipients of specific promises they would not receive in their mortal lifetime, yet still persevere in faith as examples to following believers that God is just, even though justice is deferred.

So why does God defer justice? Because He is interested in creating a perfect world, and that perfection is realized in creating beings with free will to serve Him or not as they choose. Justice *must* be deferred if human free will is to be permitted. The doctrine of retribution would entirely destroy that process, for if every living human could see that anyone who veered from

God's will was automatically punished, then human submission to God would occur, but only through fearful subjugation, not love and discipleship. Thus the wicked must be permitted to prosper just as well, or just as poorly, as any other man; the sun must rise on the just and on the unjust, and justice must be deferred for true discipleship to flourish.

2.5 Discipleship in the Presence of Suffering and Deferred Justice

We understand that justice must necessarily be deferred for true discipleship to exist. But this is not to say that we accept suffering in this present life in order to be 'repaid' later. This is simply another way of redefining the doctrine of retribution according to salvation by works, that we ultimately get to live because we deserve to, indeed God may even 'owe' us an outstanding debt from suffering we may have had to endure during our mortal discipleship.

We have considered above the various ways in which our sense of justice might be constructed most appropriately: firstly through eliminating the influences which prompt us to incorrectly label things as unjust (i.e. comfort levels; past experience; expectation functions); and also by considering the positive role suffering plays. Further to that, we should add the notion of duty. Discipleship is a duty as well as a privilege, and, while it might seem that the sense of privilege is the more pleasurable, it is the sense of duty which helps more with alleviating hardship. People complain of minor discomforts when on vacation, not at work. Admittedly a man is paid to be at work, which allows him a sense of compensation for any hardship he may encounter, but the sense of duty is also useful in bearing up under strain, because duty allows one to think outside oneself.

Furthermore, if a pious sufferer is *perfectly* pious, can he envy the wicked man who prospers? His envy can only be either

a lack of faith that God's promises of a utopian Kingdom age will come true, or a lack of perception in the true worth of that Kingdom. We shouldn't conduct our discipleships in the carnivorous expectation of 'getting what we deserve later,' but in the knowledge that we are both blessed with every sufficiency at this present time; and selected to operate as conduits of God's will in both advertising and establishing His Kingdom. Paul testifies:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

Paul was not promised later compensation for his affliction, whatever it may have been. He was assured that it worked the will of Christ and that he was fully cared for *at the present time*. With this realization we are enabled to relax over the concern of seeing ourselves, or our faith, justified before those who query, mock or disdain. It is not important to be justified; it is important to be at peace.

Thus, we live by faith. And in a true religion, depth of faith does not equal depth of need. Faith is not designed to merely assure us that every blessing we define as necessary or desirable will ultimately come our way. Faith is the assurance that God is, and that His promises for the present: of loving care and constant presence in the life of those who allow Him to be present, and His promises for the future: His Kingdom and ultimate peace, are valid. Thus we learn to develop a sense of love for God which is independent of the blessings we receive at His hand; yet equally recognizing that His gifts are an expression of

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His love. Our God is indeed uncontrollable, but He is not uncaring.

Does this reasoning form objective evidence of God's love? No, it does not, nor does it need to. The reality of God's love is not dependent on our acknowledgement of it. Other inherent realities of the universe behave the same way. Gravity didn't start working only after its influence was empirically and theoretically determined by the foremost scientists of the age. How do we know God's love is? We don't. Or more accurately, those that know, know because they know. Those who have had the privilege to feel the undeniable influence of the unmerited love of God can testify to that effect with confidence that achieves a height beyond the reach of the blindly grasping fingers of philosophical inquiry. Ergo, in whatsoever state I am, I gradually learn to be content. I learn to desist from the human inclination to try and supervise or direct the distribution of God's love, recognizing that His governance is, to me, unfathomable.

But the fact that my God is unfathomable is not *carte blanche* for me to justify clueless discipleship. He is not calling me to use the concept of faith as an excuse to justify knowing nothing about the world or my role within it. There are boundaries to acceptable conduct on both sides. On the one hand we will see, as the drama of Job unfolds, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite rebuked for claiming they knew how God worked in the lives of His disciples. This is knowledge which they could not have had, which they had usurped through arrogance, and which they had wrongly assumed was based on the doctrine of retribution. This sets a limit on one side that we shouldn't claim ownership of knowledge which belongs to God alone. Yet before we wrongly assume that such humility calls us to claim we know nothing, we see, by contrast, Nicodemus is rebuked by Jesus for failing to know things he should. Jesus says to him:

“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.”

(John 3:7-11)

On one hand there is the folly of the three friends’ arrogance, but on the other hand there is the unacceptably baffled state of Nicodemus. We don’t want to fall into either camp. But how can we distinguish between the things we are supposed to humbly acknowledge we cannot know and the things that we should?

The Bible identifies a clear distinction. We are expected to understand the explicit mechanics of our role as disciples, but not claim understanding of the explicit mechanics of God’s role as God. The following two passages clarify:

[Jesus] replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” (Matthew 13:11-12)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Romans 11:33-34 quoting Isaiah 40:13)

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So we need to apply ourselves with all heart and mind to our discipleships, to continue to work out our salvation as Paul directs (Philippians 2:12). But we need to stop auditing God. I recall Jesus' classically gentle rebuke of Peter illustrating the same point: that Peter should mind the concerns of his own discipleship, rather than attempting to supervise whatever the Father may be working in the role of another.

Then [Jesus] said to [Peter], "Follow me!" Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them...

When Peter saw [John], he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

(John 21:19-22)

We are assured "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28) in our mortal sojourn, but we can now reason this is not a statement which has anything to do with our receiving blessings or gifts, either at this time or any other. Rather, if our discipleships remain in dynamic contact with God through His word and prayer, we learn to value more and more the beauty of the plan God has; and the great gentleness He exhibits in our guidance and growth. In this way we gradually become more aligned with the will and character of God. We begin to care about the things God cares about, begin to desire the things He desires. This defines the "good" towards which we are working. Interestingly, by doing this our sufferings are also necessarily reduced, although not because we experience less affliction. We don't suddenly contract fewer diseases by taking up discipleship, suffer fewer accidents, or experience less hardship. But we are lifted further above the cares of our mortal existence and thus become ever more decoupled from those afflictions which otherwise restrict our happiness and peace of mind.

2.6 Conclusion

To summarize, we have observed and reasoned the following:

- Human pain, both physical and emotional, is real. We should sympathize with those who are hurting.
- The deification of personal happiness is a major mistake, because it leaves the individual under the false impression that suffering is evidence that God is cruel or absent.
- The human sense of injustice is a much more complex entity than that of registering pain. Our sense of justice can be influenced by preconceived ideologies of comfort, functionality and expectation; the latter of which is strongly affected by the statistical variations of prior experience.
- Events we define as suffering can be a mix of those induced by painful experiences and those arising from a sense of injustice. Those which derive from apparent injustice need to first be carefully screened to exclude misapplication of the label of suffering from the influences listed above.
- Genuine suffering, unpleasant though it may be, has many inherent values. These include an enhancement of our: empathy for others; gratitude for good times; awareness of our need; obedience to God; effectiveness in God's plan of salvation for others.
- The doctrine of retribution, whether under this old-fashioned name or its more contemporary nomenclature of karma, is a false doctrine, but very prevalent since it is attractive to the human psyche that desires justice without effort. It is not necessarily true that a person who is suffering does so because they are being punished by a greater force in the universe.
- Ultimate justice, divine justice, necessarily has to be deferred to allow true discipleship to exist. True

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discipleship is defined as service to God from choice, not through seeing everyone who abandons God instantly subjected to unpleasant circumstances.

- Since divine justice is necessarily deferred, the disciple is required to live by faith: believing that God is just and will mete His justice at the appropriate time. Arguably this *defines* a disciple (see Hebrews 11:6).
- The disciple who appropriately decouples his experience from his internal sense of justice has set his mind free to be more outward-looking. He is thus enabled to be more effective in service to others and in speaking well of God.

Now we have set these appropriate philosophical and theological parameters, we are ready to approach the Joban text. The story is a true drama: even the opening scene is appropriately spectacular. In what appears to be a harmonious setting, where the sons of God are assembled before Him, the reader is made privy to a seemingly bizarre event.

Satan, the root culprit of Job's suffering, has come among them.

“We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Walt Kelly

Chapter 3

Enter Satan

3.1 Identifying Satan

3.1.1 Understanding the word “Satan”

3.1.2 Collecting the Facts

3.1.3 Interpreting the Facts

3.2 God and Satan in Scripture

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3.3.2 Addressing the Weaknesses of
Satan as the Three Friends’ Pride

3.3.3 Strengths of Satan as the Three Friends’ Pride

3.4 Reflection

Enter Satan

Satan is a pivotal character in this account of Job's life, even though he is only included – apparently – in the prologue. The big question is: who or what is he? In the majority of analyses of Job, the character is not subject to any interpretation.^{55,56,57,58} He is merely left as the enigmatic figure who seems able to both speak in the presence of God and inflict his evil will upon Job. These expositors either conclude, or simply by default imply, that Satan is a supernaturally powerful creature – a reasonable conclusion given Satan's apparently superhuman conduct. Yet there are very good reasons, from both within the book of Job, and from the broader canon of scripture, which will require us to abandon classic notions of a Mephistophelean Superpower. For example, it is obvious none of the human characters in the book believe in a supernatural devil, else they would be most likely to conclude that “the devil” was responsible for what has befallen Job. Yet none of them even voice this as a possibility! Rather every one of them: Job, the three friends, Elihu, even Job's wife, correctly realizes that God has visited destruction on Job. Thus we are prompted to interpret that character of the Satan, yet without wresting the text of Job.

A difficulty the book of Job presents to us concerning Satan is the implication that a creature other than God has supernatural power. By contrast, the commonly given Hebrew name of God, *El Shaddai*, often translated ‘God Almighty’ (e.g. Genesis 17:1), implies omnipotence.

⁵⁵ M. Buber, “The Prophetic Faith,” 1942, in N. N. Glatzer, “The Dimensions of Job,” 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 58

⁵⁶ Y. Kaufmann, “History of the Israelite Faith,” 1947, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 66

⁵⁷ R. Gordis, “The Temptation of Job-Tradition versus Experience in Religion,” 1955, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 76

⁵⁸ G. Gutierrez, “On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 3

This issue, combined with the fact that the Hebrew word ‘Satan’ is perhaps not best understood as a proper name, provokes us to *interpret* the character of Satan. Unsurprisingly the range of postulated solutions from those who, over the years, have offered interpretations of the Satan has spanned every possibility. One can find in the published literature Satan interpreted as: God,⁵⁹ a rebellious angel who is also the scriptural character of the devil,^{60,61,62,63} an obedient angel,⁶⁴ the three friends⁶⁵ and anonymous men,^{66,67,68} and in private communications I have also heard Satan postulated to be: Job, Job’s wife, Elihu and Balaam.

We will try as much as possible to allow the Bible to interpret itself. The interpretation of Satan at which I arrive is quite different from the interpretation I was instructed to believe in Sunday School, to which I willingly adhered for many years, and was therefore quite a surprise to discover. I had been instructed that Satan was a term used to describe an obedient but inquisitive angel of the heavenly host, acting on God’s instructions to visit disaster on Job to demonstrate a truth of which he, Satan, was unaware. This interpretation is commonly adhered to and propagated in the Christian denomination (Christadelphian) and country (UK) in which I was raised. I am acutely aware how difficult it is to shed beliefs implanted at an

⁵⁹ C. G. Jung, “Answer to Job,” 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 46

⁶⁰ D. Atkinson, “The Message of Job,” 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 20

⁶¹ J. V. McGee, “Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job,” 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, 16

⁶² E. Jones, “The Triumph of Job,” 1966, SCM Press, Canterbury, UK, 27

⁶³ P. Weiss, “God, Job and Evil,” 1948, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 182

⁶⁴ J. Balchin, “Sitting with Job,” 1998, Rhoswiol Books, Oswestry, UK, 6

⁶⁵ P. Watkins, “The Devil: The Great Deceiver,” 1971, Christadelphian Magazine & Publishing Association Ltd, Birmingham, UK, 39

⁶⁶ E. M. Sponberg, “The Book of Job,” 1965, private publication, 5-7

⁶⁷ L. G. Sargent, “Ecclesiastes and Other Studies,” 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK, 103

⁶⁸ D. Baird, “The Education of Job,” 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 31

early age yet, with my own careful Bible study, this was a proposal I became obliged to refute. I am now convinced that Satan represents the rebellious pride of man. In the Joban drama, therefore, anyone behaving proudly occupies the office of the Satan. I believe that primarily this identifies the three friends of Job: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite as the hosts of the Satan; precisely because of their haughty attitude, which rendered them unable to speak that which was right about God. Let me explain how I arrived at this conclusion.

3.1 Identifying Satan

3.1.1 Understanding the word “Satan”

Primarily, the Hebrew word translated ‘Satan’ in Job appears as the definite article: i.e. “the Satan,” rather than “Satan.”⁶⁹ This use of the definite article is harmonious with the notion that it is a characteristic, or a role, not a personal character, which is being referenced, since proper names are not generally referenced with the definite article.

“Satan,” whether a proper name or not, is a Hebrew word meaning “adversary” or “opponent.” As a consequence it is a ‘name’ that can belong to anyone who takes up an opposition role. In its purest form therefore, Satan has no morally pejorative flavor, being purely a relative term. For example, if two men play chess, each is in the role of Satan to the other, simply because they are opponents to each other.

Because the word ‘satan’ is so generic, its use in scripture spans the full spectrum of beings. It is used to apply to God, angels and humans. Here is an example of each:

⁶⁹ J. Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version,” in “Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance,” 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 115

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- a) God as “Satan.” Compare these two synonymous accounts:

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.” (2 Samuel 24:1)

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

- b) An angel as “Satan”

But God’s anger was kindled because he [Balaam] went; and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his adversary [Hebrew: Satan]. Now he was riding on the ass, and his two servants were with him.

(Numbers 22:22, RSV)

- c) A human man as “Satan”

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

(Matthew 16:23)

“Satan” is not the only word which has this degree of flexibility, although it is perhaps one of few which is commonly assumed to be a proper name. For example the Hebrew “Elohim,” meaning a Mighty One, who stands in power to rule and judge, is used equally broadly in the scriptures referring to God (Genesis 1:1), angels (Psalm 8:4-5, KJV) and men (Exodus 21:5-6).

So the fact that the book of Job contains a character called Satan should give us pause to think that this character could in fact be anyone: from God, to an angel, or a man; or anything.

3.1.2 Collecting the Facts from Job

We aren't given a great deal of facts with which to solve the mystery of the character of Satan, which is doubtless why this question remains much debated. Using the direct expressions given in the prologue we have the following:

1 The Satan presented *is the opponent of God*. This fact seems often overlooked by expositors, who tend to suppose that Satan opposes Job. Job chapter 1 contains opposing dialogue between the Satan and God: Job isn't even present! In fact the Satan is described as Satan before the subject of Job is even raised. Certainly the Satan does not speak well of Job's intentions, indeed he even slanders him, but it is God he opposes. (That said, because Job is a godly man, any Satan of God's must also be a Satan of Job's, and vice versa.)

2 The Satan identifies himself as coming from the Earth.

The LORD said... "Where have you come from?" Satan answered... "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." (1:7)

3 The Satan knows Job well. (1:10)

4 The Satan is given authority (by God) to cause calamity to Job. This contains the intriguing implication that the Satan does not himself possess the power to harm Job.

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." (1:12)

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with

painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. (2:6-7)

5 The Satan came to “present himself before the Lord.” We’re told this twice; which may imply this happens regularly.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. (1:6, RSV, also 2:1)

3.1.3 Interpreting the Facts

Since this is God’s Satan, and by extension Job’s Satan since Job is a godly man, Satan is necessarily an ungodly entity. This already eliminates the possibility of the Satan being an obedient angel, and we shall see further evidence below to corroborate that elimination. In fact this points in the direction of a human origin for the Satan, since humans are the only elements of creation who have free will to either serve God or rebel against Him as we choose (c.f. Jeremiah 8:7).

This lends a good reason for why the impersonal pronoun (i.e. *the* Satan) is used. As we have seen, Satan can be anything to anyone, provided it is in an opposition role. But when it is God’s Satan, it is reasonable to describe the office as THE Satan – THE opponent. Thus although the word Satan in general does not carry a morally pejorative flavor, THE Satan, God’s Satan, must necessarily be ungodly in nature, by definition as God’s opponent.

God asks the Satan:

“Where have you come from?” (1:6)

An omniscient God does not need to ask this, or indeed any, question. The question is reflective of its precedential ancestor, asked to Adam: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). In both cases God is not seeking information He is unable to

obtain. It isn't that God didn't know behind which bush Adam was crouching. Neither was God unaware of exactly where Satan had come from, and exactly what he was up to. So why does God ask these questions, when He clearly doesn't need to? When God speaks, it's for the hearer to learn something. I suggest that in each case He is revealing that those to whom He is speaking *are not in company with Him*. When He says to Adam, after Adam has broken the only rule there was, "Where are you, Adam?" I submit He is essentially saying: "You're not with me any more, Adam, are you?" And similarly in Job: "Where have you come from, Satan?" translates as: "You're not one of Mine, are you?" This would also explain the literary contrast expressed in Satan's appearing with the 'sons of God.' The sons of God belong to God; the Satan does not. These questions are posed in order for the contemporary recipient, and later readers, to reflect upon the 'location,' spiritually speaking, of the one whom God is addressing. So in the book of Job the question indicates that the Satan is not a member of the heavenly host, who are 'with God' in both physical proximity (Matthew 18:10) and, more relevantly, spiritual purpose (38:7).

The second fact instructs us that Satan was 'of the Earth.' This too is naturally satisfied with the Satan as human.

The Satan knows who Job is. This is satisfied either by a creature with supernatural powers, or by humans that were within circles of Job's associates.

The fourth fact is intriguing: the Satan is granted power by God to hurt Job. This fact requires some investigation, even to remain consistent with other quotes within the text of Job!

The Bible clarifies that God controls everything, including enabling, allowing or preventing disaster (Isaiah 45:5-7). The power to cause fire to fall from heaven, for example (1:16), is beyond the capacity of humans to induce and must have come from God. Furthermore, the book of Job establishes beyond doubt that God was the one who brought calamity on Job:

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All his [Job's] brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. (42:11 also 2:3)

Does this mean God was the Satan in Job? No, since that doesn't fit with the other facts we learned about Satan.

If we consider this fact on its own then the Satan could be an angel, because when God acts, it is commonly described as being performed by an angel, whether it is an act of deliverance (Daniel 6:22) or destruction (Psalm 78:49-50).

But the teaching of Peter provides a categorical piece of evidence to the contrary:

...angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against [righteous men] in the presence of the Lord. (2 Peter 2:11)

This alone eliminates the possibility of the Satan in Job being an angel, because it is clear the Satan slanders Job.

Finally, we explore the phrase "present themselves before the Lord." Scripture shows that this language is never used for angels, but is commonly used for humans. Here is the evidence:

The LORD said to Moses... "Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain." (Exodus 34:1-2)

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. (Joshua 24:1)

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy... (Jude 1:24, KJV)

By contrast, scripture speaks of the angels as being permanently in the presence of God. Jesus says:

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)

For the book of Job to be consistent with these other scriptures, those who are “presented before the Lord” in Job, including the Satan, are of human, rather than immortal, constituency.

This prompts a further question: “Where did this presentation before the Lord occur?” In each case outside the book of Job the place where men are presented “before the Lord” or “in the presence of the Lord” referred to a sanctified place of worship on Earth.

Yet we’re still left with many unanswered questions. If Satan is represented by a human, who is he? Does he appear in the text of Job? How does he achieve the affliction of Job? And how does the conversation between God and Satan actually take place?

It’s time to step back and view the bigger picture of interactions in scripture between God and Satan. By doing this, we will develop a template of how interactions between God and Satan occur and then return to the book of Job with this template in hand, to answer these questions and conclude our identification of the Satan.

3.2 God and Satan in Scripture

3.2.1 The Big Picture

There is a common template of interaction between God and those who, over the ages, occupy the office of the Satan. The characteristics forming this template are summarized in the table.

	Elements of the template trend between God and His Satan in the Bible
1	God pronounces a truth
2	Satan opposes God's truth: ("opposes" by definition, since "Satan" means "opponent") and declares an untruth
2b	Characteristically this untruth forms an accusation against a righteous man
3	God rebukes Satan for his misbehavior

Table 3_1: Template trend of the relationship between God and "Satan" in the Bible.

Here are three Biblical cases which establish this trend:

Example 1: The serpent in Eden

{1} Pronouncement of God's truth

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

{2} Satan opposes, speaking untruth

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

Revelation 12:9, as below, shows that the serpent of Eden is labeled Satan.

{2b} Satan's untruths are accusations against the righteous

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." (Revelation 12:9-10, RSV)

{3} Satan is rebuked by God

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:14-15)

Example 2: Peter contradicting Christ

{1} Jesus reveal's God's truth, that he is to be killed and raised the third day (Matthew 16:21). **{2}** Peter opposes by assuring the Lord this will not be (Matthew 16:22). **{2b}** No doubt Peter's intention was entirely to encourage, even protect, his Lord. Yet he has launched an accusation against Jesus, for if Jesus has spoken of things which are not, in fact, going to happen, then Jesus has spoken falsely. **{3}** Satan is rebuked (Matthew 16:23). I believe Jesus calls Peter 'Satan' to give instruction on this very principle of who Satan really is; not because he was especially angry at Peter, who was loyally, if inappropriately, trying to defend the Master he loved.

Example 3: The enemies of Judah slandering the Jews and Jerusalem as a people and place of wickedness

{1} God pronounces a truth: that He will be manifested in Jerusalem and faithfully worshiped there (Ezra 1:1-3). {2} Satan opposes. Those listed explicitly as Judah's enemies set out to frustrate the building, (Ezra 4:1,4) {2b} by spreading accusatory untruths against the righteous and naming Jerusalem a rebellious and wicked city (Ezra 4:6,11-12). {3} Satan is rebuked by God for his slander upon God's people and His chosen city, Jerusalem. (Zechariah 3:1-3: the prophet Zechariah is contemporary to the priest Ezra; their books comment on the same historical events.)

3.2.2 The Local Picture: God and Satan in Job

The above template of the three-point relationship between God and Satan in scripture now identifies who "Satan" is in Job; finding an answer on common ground with all points raised so far. We look for the signature characteristic of Satan: the spreading of untruths which form accusations against the righteous. We expect to find:

{1} A pronouncement of God's truth

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (1:8 c.f. 1:1)

{2} Satan opposes God...

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied... "But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (1:9,11)

{2b} ...by accusing the righteous with lies

Eliphaz the Temanite:

"Is not your wickedness great?

Are not your sins endless?

You demanded security from your brothers for no reason;
you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them naked.” (22:6)

Bildad the Shuhite:

“The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out;
the flame of his fire stops burning...
He has no offspring or descendants among his people,
no survivor where once he lived.” (18:5,19)

[consider this statement in the context that Job’s family had been destroyed: 1:18-19.]

Zophar the Naamathite:

“Oh, how I wish that God would speak,
that he would open his lips against you
and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom,
for true wisdom has two sides.
Know this: God has even forgotten some of your
sin.” (11:5-6)

Note the parallel between these lies and the original lies recorded in the prologue. In the prologue the Satan accuses Job of worshipping God only because he received blessings from Him and, symmetrically in the main body, the Satan accuses that Job must have abandoned his worship of God, on the basis that he ostensibly no longer receives blessings from Him. These are the two complementary sides of the singular doctrine of retribution, to which the Satan clings throughout.

{3} God rebukes Satan

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven

To Speak Well of God

rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.” (42:7-8)

So, by using the Bible to interpret itself, this template identifies the prideful comments of Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, the three friends of Job, as emulating the Satan. A summary of this characteristic interaction between God and Satan is shown in Table 3_2.

	Element of Template	Eden	Peter	Captivity	Book of Job
1	God speaks a truth	Gen 2:16-17	Matt 16:21	Ezra 1:1-3	1:1,8
2	Satan speaks an untruth	Gen 3:4-5	Matt 16:22	Ezra 4:1-4	1:9-11
2b	The untruth forms an accusation	Rev 12:9-10	Matt 16:22	Ezra 4:6-12	11:5-6; 18:5,19; 22:6
3	God rebukes Satan	Gen 3:14-15	Matt 16:23	Zech 3:1-3	42:7-8

Table 3_2: Identifying Satan in Job by applying the teaching from other scriptural interactions as a template.

3.3 Satan as the Three Friends' Pride

3.3.1 Weaknesses of Satan as the Three Friends' Pride

1 God's response to the Satan in the prologue was that he spoke falsely about God's disciple, Job. God's response to

Eliphaz in the epilogue is that he spoke falsely about God. These seem to be different.

2 The conversation between God and Satan is hard to envisage with Satan as the three friends talking back to the Almighty, before whom humans are generally cowed (although the prophet Jonah seems a notable exception). Similarly, it is highly unlikely that the three friends have any knowledge of the events of the prologue, otherwise they would know immediately why the afflictions have come upon Job; and the resulting debate would be equally unlikely. This point alone is enough for some commentators to immediately reject the suggestion that the Satan could be associated with the three friends.⁷⁰

3 When the friends first hear of Job's catastrophes, they express heartfelt sympathy for him (2:11-13). There is nothing in the text of Job which leads us to believe this sympathy is anything but completely genuine. We might suppose that if they had deliberately and consciously conspired to bring destruction against Job, this sympathy would not have been expressed.

3.3.2 Addressing the Weaknesses of Satan as the Three Friends' Pride

1 [Elihu] was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. (32:3)

This verse is listed as another of the 'Emendations of the Sopherim' we considered earlier. Sometimes these emendations are reported as errors, sometimes as deliberate alterations out of respect for God.⁷¹ The ancient Hebrew tradition records that this

⁷⁰ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 5

⁷¹ L. W. Bullinger, Appendix 33 in: "The Companion Bible," 1974, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA.

verse originally read “yet had condemned God.” If so, it would obviously alleviate the disparity noted above.

In any event, I am not persuaded the difference between condemning God and condemning Job is that significant, strictly because the presentation of Job in the drama is limited to one who behaves blamelessly. In either case, therefore, the accusations are leveled against blameless conduct, an essential parameter of godliness. The Satan of God will invariably be the Satan of a truly righteous man.

2 Let’s consider how the conversation could have taken place between God and the Satan. Mortal men seldom have the mental composure or audacity to argue with Almighty God, (at least when the presence of God is perceived: many men speak mightily brave slanders about the Lord whilst unaware of His proximate presence). In the case of the Satan arguing with God in Job, the conversation is almost impossible to explain in any form and stay consistent with all other scriptural constraints. No matter what interpretation we try to apply, we seem to run headlong into a scriptural prohibition!

First, let’s try to understand the location of the conversation – or at least where it *cannot* have occurred. The scriptures show us that the conversation could not have taken place in Heaven. This is because:

- No man has ever ascended into Heaven (John 3:13).
- Angels, who exist in Heaven, do not commit slander (2 Peter 2:11), and we know Satan slanders Job (1:11).
- The Lord Jesus taught: “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” (Luke 11:17) So there could not be a division between God and His heavenly host, either in Heaven or anywhere else.⁷²

⁷² One may wonder about the veracity of this comment in light of John’s vision of war in heaven (Revelation 12:1-9). John is experiencing a vision, rather than chronicling an observed narrative, so we should not insist on a recognizable reality in a vision; although even then we might expect that the divine principle of harmony in Heaven should not be undermined. I suggest

- The Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray God's will would be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven (Luke 11:2). But if the book of Job shows us that God's will is actually not agreed upon in Heaven, but rather instead there is a lot of arguing, bickering and even slander going on, Jesus would be foolish to recommend his disciples pray that God's will be done on Earth the same way!

So we can be certain the argument between God and the Satan did not take place in Heaven: a conclusion at which Sargent also arrives.⁷³ This disallows the label "Heaven's Council" or "Heaven's Court" for the discussions between God and the Satan: a term that is often, wrongly, applied^{74,75,76} and corroborates our earlier finding that the Satan cannot be angelic.

At this point it becomes reasonable to translate the "conversation" between God and the Satan as a literary device. The following is suggested as an explanation of what really happened:

The three friends "came to present themselves before the Lord," the same way a modern believer might simply go to church. I do not mean to suggest the presence of God is only located in a formal church setting, but it is a Biblical principle that the presence of God is heightened by a congregation of believers (Matthew 18:19-20), and this language in Job is reflective of that principle. It also neatly explains why the Satan appears in the presence of the Lord on a regular basis (1:6 & 2:1).

the scripture uses the word 'heaven' to describe two different things: a) "Heaven": the localized maximum intensity of God's presence and b) "heaven": the astronomical heavens, the abode of the stars. The war John sees is conducted in "heaven": the abode of the stars (see v 1,4). In fact the vision itself corroborates that "Heaven": the presence of God and His Throne, is elsewhere (see v 5).

⁷³ L. G. Sargent, *Ibid*, 102

⁷⁴ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 3

⁷⁵ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 20

⁷⁶ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 31

So, while ‘in church,’ the three friends bring their slanderous beliefs before the Lord – simply in their meditations. It’s likely they see Job in the religious assembly, and at the sight of Job their blood boils with the sense of perceived injustice. God sees their thoughts as clearly as if they had been shouted aloud. His response to the jealous slander of Job is recorded in the book of Job, but, I suggest, God’s words are not heard by the three friends. In other words, the Satan is *unaware* that he is in conversation with God, even as the conversation proceeds. This satisfies the essential requirement that the three friends have no knowledge of the events of the prologue. I understand the ‘conversation’ in Job as a poetic recapitulation of the progression of events as God responds to the thoughts he sees in the hearts of those prideful men who come before Him.

This allows God to be in Heaven, and the three friends on Earth (which is where Satan identifies his origin anyway – 1:7) as the ‘conversation’ takes place. The literary device of representing this sequence of progressing events as a conversation is an attractive way to reveal to the reader how God works in human lives, bringing situations we need to experience to bear as He works to fashion more godly disciples and gently chafe away the rough edges that do not reflect Him.

How does affliction come upon Job from the three friends? The drama proceeds this way. The friends see Job and think: “How could God allow this injustice? Doesn’t He see that the only reason Job is pious is because of all the material blessings He has given him?” God ‘replies’ – though the friends never hear the words – “I see what you’re thinking. You think that if Job loses his material possessions he’ll curse Me? I have something to teach you. I’ll empower your wicked thoughts and act on them. I will send my angel to bring destruction on Job just as your wicked thoughts wanted and you will see, through the continuing righteousness of my servant, the type of God I am and what I am working to ultimately achieve.” This demonstrates God was the one who *caused* the affliction, but the Satan is the

one who is *to blame for* the affliction arriving. God explains both of these points:

“[Job] still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.” (2:3)

I believe this explanation satisfies all the scriptural criteria.

3 What then of the friends’ sympathy for Job? The explanation I have described requires that humans be sufficiently complex as to harbor bitterness against a man, but then in the face of his suffering feel genuine compassion. It requires that evil thoughts within human hearts can be displaced by tragedy, or that contradictory thoughts can be in the heart at one time. The Joban tale bears out the truth of this, as does everyday experience. An example is seen explicitly in the case of Eliphaz the Temanite’s comments: we can see he flatly contradicts himself between 4:3-6 and 22:5-11. As a further poignant example we will also see Job’s pain cause him to contradict himself when speaking of whether he wants God to be near to him or far away (7:16-19 & 29:2-6). Human history details the veracity of this trend also. We are by nature schizophrenic creatures, harboring thoughts of ill-intent and love side by side, often for the very same person! It is possible for someone to be angry with a work colleague, yet when that same colleague is involved in a significant road accident the anger completely vanishes and is replaced with genuine sympathy and compassion.

Scripturally, James, in his epistle, reinforces this idea when he denounces the human mouth being used as a spring of both blessing and cursing (James 3:9-12). An extreme version of this behavior is the case of King Saul. Repeatedly, Saul is spared death at the hands of David, whom he is unfairly persecuting. Equally repeatedly, Saul is genuinely penitent and remorseful for his ungodly hatred of David when he is spared (e.g. 1 Samuel 24:16-21). Yet each time after he is released, Saul’s jealousy of

David creeps back and he returns to his destructive ways (e.g. 1 Samuel 26:1-2). In fact every one of us is exactly the same as King Saul each time God spares us from the just deserts of our sins and releases us freely by His grace and we subsequently return to the very destructive practices which we genuinely repudiate.

I see a physical analogy in boiling food on a stove. One brings water to the boil over a flame and then plunges the (relatively cold) food into the boiling pot. Immediately the bubbling of the water ceases. But the *source* of the boiling is the flame beneath the pot and, unless that too is removed, it won't be long before the pot, even with the food in, is bubbling once again. I suggest we see exactly the same thing happening in the book of Job. The three friends harbor bitterness and resentment against Job, fueled by the flame of their own pride (the Satan). When disaster strikes Job, the shock is sufficient to submerge their embitterment temporarily in genuine care for their friend. All thoughts of willing destruction upon Job, either to see him abandon his faith or for any other reason, are gone – at least for now. And at no point do they realize there is a connection between their bitterness and Job's suffering. But the flame of their pride is still burning and so, slowly but surely, their slanderous evaluation of Job bubbles back to the surface as the debate proceeds.

3.3.3 Strengths of Satan as the Three Friends' Pride

1 Most importantly, the interpretation of the Satan as the resident spirit in the three friends affects our view of who God is. The three friends are brought to salvation by the events recorded in Job. This allows us to interpret the reason God entered the 'barter' with the Satan as having the specific intent of bringing salvation to those infected by 'him'! This is of critical importance, as this interpretation demonstrates the love of God more powerfully than any other (c.f. John 3:16), and I embrace this

interpretation very strongly for that reason.⁷⁷ I will say more about this view of God which this interpretation reveals later, as it is a central conclusion of this exposition.

2 Seeing the Satan as the three friends' pride means that the book of Job now evidences great internal integrity. With traditional interpretations of the Satan, as either an evil supernatural being, an angel of the Lord, or some unrelated human, he disappears as early as chapter 2 and never returns. With this understanding the Satan is a vital character who remains centrally present as the drama unfolds. The innermost thoughts of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are present in chapter 1 under the nomenclature 'the Satan,' with their thoughts distilled into the dramatic persona opposing God. Similarly, the Satan is present throughout the core of the book: in the debate with the righteous man, all the way to the closing chapter, where he is rebuked. This internal integrity of the book of Job which results from the interpretation therefore lends credence to the interpretation.

3 This interpretation is consistent with the broader Biblical teaching of how God speaks to men. If we consider the spectrum of obedience to God's will, from Jesus at one end, to the atrociously wicked at the other, we see God talks much more to the obedient, and in very direct ways, and much less to the disobedient, and in more oblique ways.

⁷⁷ However, the fact that this interpretation permits the God of the book of Job to be seen as loving, to an extent that no other interpretation does, was not instrumental in achieving the interpretation itself: it was only realized afterwards. I am sensitive to the thoughts of a 20th century philosopher, who once wrote: "When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong." [B. Fuller, in "*Peter's Quotations*," L. J. Peter, 1977, Bantam Books, New York, 37] Similarly here, the interpretation of the Satan as the pride of the three friends was established from the reasoning presented in Section 3.2. The power and beauty of the resulting conclusion was only appreciated after the conclusion was reached.

Consider: scripture directly states it is a divine principle that God's Word speaks more directly to those who are closer to God, and less directly to others, both in the Old Testament (Proverbs 1:23) and in the New, where Jesus communicates only in parables to the crowds and explains those parables only to his disciples (Matthew 13:10-17). Jesus reinforces this concept when he says he will speak ever more plainly about the Father as the apostles mature in discipleship (John 16:25). In practice, therefore, God communicates His plan in detail to the most godly man, Jesus (John 15:14-15) and also speaks directly and at length to other very godly men, like Job (Job 38-41). At the lowest end of the spectrum, those who have drifted so far from God's guidance that they even sacrifice their children in the fire – a practice abhorrent to God (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) – God promises He will not even answer their prayers (Ezekiel 20:31).⁷⁸

Thus the interpretation I propose, that the record of God speaking to Satan is a literary device where the Satan (the opponent) doesn't hear God's words is fully consistent with the pattern of God speaking ever less directly to those ever less resonant with Him. It also gives us a sobering insight into the potentially lethal power of free will we possess. We have the power to exclude even the Almighty from our lives, should we so disastrously desire.

4 The Satan is now rebuked by God (42:7-8). With any other interpretation the Satan gets away scot-free with his slander of Job and scorn of the Almighty. Only with this interpretation is the Satan rebuked by God; i.e. in common with the other interactions between God and Satan in the scriptural record.

5 The interpretation of Satan as the three friends' pride also makes the book of Job consistent with the rest of scripture

⁷⁸ Similarly, the Egyptians, the opponents of Israel, never saw the light that was in the pillar of cloud: to them God showed only the dark side (Exodus 14:19-20).

concerning the nature of the Satan. I have long been persuaded that the devil, or *the* Satan as we have defined him (i.e. God's Satan), is a representation of the human mind's tendency to resist the mandate of reflecting his Maker (Genesis 1:26); rather than being any supernatural demon. Evidence for the heart of man being the ultimate, even sole, opponent of God exists throughout the scripture, from the earliest times (Genesis 6:5), through the times of the prophets (Jeremiah 17:9), into the New Testament (Mark 7:20-23). This interpretation of Satan in Job being human pride opposing God is consistent with this trend.

6 Satan's characteristics are evidently human.

a) The Satan is driven by jealousy of Job's material wealth. Although his argument concerns the motivation for Job's worship of God, it is evident that his awareness of Job's wealth has prompted his objection. Would either an angel, or a Mephistophelean Superpower, posing his supernatural guile and strength in eternal battle with the Almighty, be likely to get all worked up because Job has got a lot of camels? No. Jealousy of material possessions is an emotional response so preternaturally petty as to indicate a human origin.

b) Satan is stupid! The entire basis of the Satan's argument is that he is actually cleverer than God and has observed something which God has missed. The Satan argues that while God can only see the surface evidence that Job is a good man, God has missed the more subtle underlying reason of *why* Job appears to be a good man. This underlying truth, the Satan reasons, he alone is clever enough to see, and he patiently explains to God that this is because Job enjoys material blessings at the Hand of the Lord.

Is it credible that an angel of the Lord would be so arrogant to believe that he was cleverer than God? Of course not! History repeatedly testifies, on occasion without number, that it is we humans who guide our lives as if we knew better than God.

Ironically, the much respected philosopher Carl Jung repeats the identically arrogant folly in his exposition of Job. Jung argues that Job himself is actually more intelligent and of greater integrity than God, and the reason that Job suffers is because God maliciously wounds him out of jealousy.⁷⁹ In so doing, Jung's unique analysis explicitly repeats the Satan's folly: the notion that ultimately humans are better than God. The scriptures testify both to man's stupidity in repeatedly making this claim and also to the reality that it is God, rather than man, who sees clearly below the surface into the thoughts and desires of a man's heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

c) The Satan describes his origin as "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1:7, KJV). The suggestion that the Satan is realized as proud men is a very natural interpretation of this fact. In fairness, angels can also be described behaving the same way (Zechariah 1:10-11), but Peter's education that angels do not slander righteous men (2 Peter 2:11) has eliminated this possibility.

The claim itself also has a sense of pride about it. It speaks of having a worldly experience that others might not have: of having "seen a few things," having "been around a bit," and therefore being in a position to make informed and accurate judgments. In a later chapter I will postulate that the timing of the book of Job is contemporary with Israel's wilderness wanderings after their exodus from Egypt, which would resonate very naturally, even poignantly, with why their lives might be summarized as 'wandering to and fro' in the Earth.

d) The Satan 'shifts the goalposts' when shown to be wrong. The initial barter between God and the Satan is whether or not Job will curse God if his circumstances are substantially afflicted. Job is destroyed on a material level, yet he does not curse the Lord (1:20-22). So Satan loses the barter. But, far from humbly

⁷⁹ C. G. Jung, "Answer to Job," 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 45

admitting error, the Satan simply shifts the goalposts, asserting that, essentially, he is still right and if different criteria are applied then his rectitude, and God's error, will be revealed.

[God says:] “[Job] still maintains his integrity, though you incited Me against him to ruin him without any reason.”

“Skin for skin!” Satan replied... “stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” (2:3-5)

Again, shifting the goalposts when shown to be wrong is a behavior very commonly associated with humans.⁸⁰

e) Ultimately, the Satan's delight is the downfall of a righteous man: or at least in the revelation of one who appears to be godly as a hypocrite. Again, this trait is well exemplified by prideful human behavior. The bloodlust to expose an apparently righteous man, such as a prominent Christian figure, as a charlatan and a hypocrite, and to revel in the *schadenfreude* of every failure that is able to be exposed, is one that resides quite openly in the human populace. We have only to glance at the nearest newspaper, or online political blog, to observe it.

All these traits of the Satan are shown to be very natural human conditions which are not common with angels or supernatural beings. Interestingly, expositors seem to have come right to the threshold of determining that the Satan was an office occupied by the three friends, only to fail to spot what they had discovered. For example, Gutierrez noted that the opinions of Satan were invariably mirrored by the opinions of the three

⁸⁰ I'm not trying to say that 'shifting the goalposts' is necessarily a wicked practice, merely a human one. We see examples of good men 'shifting the goalposts' with God too: for example Abraham, when he beautifully champions the citizens of Sodom who are marked for destruction (Genesis 18:23-33), and also Gideon, when he seeks to build his courage to attack the Midianite hosts (Judges 6:36-40).

friends,⁸¹ yet still took Satan to be a supernatural devil. Likewise Atkinson commented: “In effect what the friends have done is to continue the satanic assault on Job of which we read in chapters 1 and 2.”⁸² I believe these are both highly pertinent observations which should have been followed to their natural conclusion: that the pride of the three friends forms the Satanic character of the drama.

7 The interpretation of Satan as the three friends’ pride transforms the account of Job into something relevant to the disciple’s daily life. We have the same weaknesses and failings as the three friends; we too stumble into pride just like they did. So we too are Satan! I get out of bed in the morning and look in the mirror. Behold, Satan! And thus the book of Job, the struggle between Satan and the one who would be righteous, begins again each morning. The book of Job now provides me 28 chapters of explicit struggle and debate between the Satan and the righteous man; something of first-hand relevance to the disciple’s internal struggles! I find this quite a life-changing appreciation of the book of Job, to see it now as relevant to my everyday struggles, as well as being a fascinating and timeless drama.

3.4 Reflection

We have identified the Satan, the prime – even sole – enemy of God, as human pride. Thus in the case of the book of Job, anyone infected with pride takes the mantle of the Satan. This identifies the three friends as the Satan throughout the drama and, as we shall see, even Job is briefly infected, before the Lord intervenes to save him.

But is it really fair comment to say pride is the only sin we commit? At first consideration, I’m tempted to say that must be

⁸¹ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 4

⁸² D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 63

wrong. Surely there are sins of sexual lust or covetous theft which are not essentially prideful. But ultimately, any sin can be extrapolated to a single base cause. The motivation of: “I deserve it,” or at least: “I don’t care enough about anyone but myself not to take what I want,” underpins all the sins we could conceive, and is ultimately the same thing: the elevation of one’s own personal desires over and above the dictates of either God or fellow man. Selfish pride!

As our exposition unfolds we will see how Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite step into the shoes of the Satan character as they proudly expound their accusations of Job. We concluded the conversation between the Satan and God in the prologue is a literary device representing the interactions God caused in the three men’s lives as a direct response to the thoughts He saw in their hearts. Spongberg agrees that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar could not have knowledge of what transpired in the prologue but, where this drew him to conclude that they therefore could not have formed the Satan,⁸³ we have identified a solution which marries well with the evidence suggesting they are.

The three men were unaware that the disaster the Lord brought upon Job was a consequence of the embittered jealousy they held in their hearts for him. This suggestion, of a blindness that does not allow a man to see the destruction he wreaks upon the Earth, has clear scriptural precedent, even among the godliest of men. When David sinned with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), Nathan the prophet came to him and recounted his sin to him as a parable, to explain how it appeared in the divine Eye (2 Samuel 12:1-4). Despite David’s godliness, which is doubtless far in excess of the three friends in Job, he was unable to recognize himself within the analogous reconstruction of his life that Nathan recited. So in righteous anger he condemned the antagonist of the piece (2 Samuel 12:5-6). Is David alone in possessing this spiritual blindness? I doubt it! He was one of the

⁸³ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*

godliest men to walk the Earth, and logically this type of blindness will prove more severe in less godly men.

Thus I have no doubt Nathan could have reappeared before Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite and read them the prologue to the Joban drama verbatim, without any of them suspecting for one minute that they were the ones triggering the destruction that came upon Job.

Yet how easy it is to spot faults in others! I'm drawn to wonder how many times I have fallen victim to exactly the same blindness. How many times could a prophet in the Lord's service have come to my side and recounted to me in explicit detail the interactions of my life as the Lord saw them, only for me to fail to recognize I was even present in the retelling? How many times might I, as David at his most ungodly, have thunderously denounced the Satan of the parable, only to hear the words of a still, small voice intone:

“Thou art the man.”

It's good cause for reflection.

As we have said, the interpretation of Satan as the three friends transforms the account of Job into something relevant to the disciple's daily life, precisely because we have the same weaknesses as the three friends. And this leads to dangers for us, even in reading Job. For example, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are easy to despise. I have not read an expositor of Job who has not designed some carefully constructed barbs for them and seemingly with relish delivered them. Yet when we do so, ironically, we become them! Their problem was a lack of true sympathy and comradeship with their brother in the faith. And, since we know they are saved at the end of the drama, we who consider ourselves disciples of the Lord must also recognize them as our brothers. Foolish and stumbling perhaps, but then all the more so just like ourselves, and our brothers indeed. God worked for their salvation, as He works for ours. So we need to treat

these three stumbling brethren as we would like to be treated if we were in their shoes, which we probably have been often enough.

We may still ask: “But why conceal the truth? If the Satan in Job was the pride of the three friends, why doesn’t the prologue simply say so?” To me this encapsulates the beauty of the drama. To reveal the identity of the Satan slowly is to re-enact how the friends themselves discovered it. It’s plain the friends initially thought themselves pretty good disciples of the Lord God; well-educated in the principles of truth and eager to expound them at any moment. How wrong they were. And by obscuring the Satan’s (their) identity in the prologue, the text neatly retains the fact that the whole drama was a journey of discovery for them, to discover their true nature and ultimately appreciate the priest (Job) who brought them to atonement with the Father. Likewise it is a journey for us too, to discover both them as the Satan in the book of Job; and ourselves as the Satan in our own discipleships!

For there is greater diversity to the multitudinous Satan than merely Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. We too are Satan. I don’t believe I have read a single exposition of Job, in more than forty, where the author even briefly pauses to admit identity with the folly and pride of the friends, the pride of which every one of us is guilty. The book of Job is simply awash with irony. We too host the Satan, just like the three friends and, also just like the three friends, we have no idea that we do. Thus the prologue of the book of Job is also a mirror of the prologue of our lives. Early on in life, in the opening chapters one might say, we learn there is evil in the world. But right from the start we are wholly convinced that evil could not possibly have anything to do with us. We are not the Satan, we tell ourselves confidently. And we are as wrong as they. Thus the journey of discovery begins anew and we are all posed the divine question:

“Have you considered my servant Job?”

I now realize this question points squarely at me. Have I considered God's servant Job? Why would I? I suppose because God has set up, for those who would be His followers, examples of excellent men who have gone before to encourage and inspire us. I used to read that line as a mere exchange in a play which was nothing to do with me. But identifying Satan in this way, as the prideful heart of man, which heart I own, I realize it is truly my place to consider God's servant Job.

As for the struggle itself, between the Satan and the righteous man, this too is something with which we are intimately familiar. It's not just the three friends with whom we can empathize. Which disciple does not internally experience the perpetual war between the righteous man and Satan, on which Paul so passionately agonizes (Romans 7)? So where in the scriptures are the real life case studies of such struggles? Where lies the potential solace from seeing the battle played out in the everyday life of the aspiring disciple? With this interpretation of the Satan, one answer becomes: the book of Job! Without this interpretation, the events played out in Job do not reveal so directly the explicitly inner struggle of the disciple. But when I realize that the struggle which occupies the majority of the drama, between Job and his three friends, is an extraction of the essence of godliness versus its natural opposition, I see that it is the same fight taking place within my heart and mind every day!

I also now see why Job has to be presented as purely righteous in the story (even though he will have sinned in reality) and why the spirit of the three friends is extracted as the Satan. In both cases it is so that the reader can see the purest form of the struggle between righteousness and rebellion in the central and largest feature of the drama: the debate. Actually, one of the most dramatic differences this interpretation of Satan has is that the poetic bulk of the book, the debate, is now intimately connected to the prosaic beginning and end. The book is now cast in a wholly new light. The majority of the text of Job, about two thirds, is him arguing with his three friends. This is a substantial

part of the Bible: it's about the same size as one of the gospels! Can two thirds of the volume of Job simply be an aside? Surely not! Job is a righteous man: his three friends voice the spirit of Satan. So the core of the book is now seen to concern the struggle between a righteous man and Satan – of supreme relevance to the initial debate between the Satan and God!

It is also important that the Satan be represented as a plural number of men, not just one. If Satan were represented in the drama as just one man, for example Eliphaz the Temanite, it might imply to the reader that Satanic behavior really belonged in just one personality and was not a generic human trait. It would speak of a very singular devil. One might be tempted to carry this learning forward through the centuries and relegate the pervasiveness of human wickedness to similarly singular cases in history, such as Adolf Hitler or Osama bin Laden. With the plural representation of the Satan it is more powerfully shown that the opponent of God, human pride, resides in every human heart; (albeit some men will embrace that adversarial nature more intensely than others).

Going a step further, can we theorize why there would be *three* men as Satan, as opposed to another number? This may risk taking interpretation a step too far, for I have always felt that too much interpretation is read into specific numbers in the Bible. However with that said, the number three does seem to be tied to a preponderant number of cases of God's mercy, mainly in demarcating a length of time before God's mercy is revealed. The archetypal case is the three days Jesus spent in the tomb prior to his resurrection (Matthew 12:40). This is prefigured by the three days Jonah spends in the belly of the whale (Jonah 1:17), before God instigates his release (Jonah 2:10). There are additional cases, too, such as Elijah praying three times over the body of the deceased Sidonian boy before God's mercy restores him to life (1 Kings 17:7-24), and also the three days Jesus' parents spent searching for him when he was twelve, frantic with worry, before finding him in the temple courts (Luke 2:41-50). It would be an

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especially acute irony, therefore, if the number of the friends in the drama was determined by God deliberately to be three, because the quality the three friends *lacked* above all was mercy. What a dramatic landscape that would set, pitting the natural state of unmerciful man in direct juxtaposition with the number three, the same number in which the mercy of the Loving Father is so frequently demonstrated in the scriptures.

Extending from this thought, having three accusers ably announces the superlative of the Father's mercy relative to the law. The law stated:

One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

Thus according to the law Job was condemned, since three witnesses were found in agreement together to accuse him. Nevertheless by God's grace, superior to the condemnation of man, Job was declared righteous.

The realization of the identity of Satan as the three friends' pride formed, for me, one of those epiphany moments. The entire emphasis of the book is now shifted. No longer is the primary emphasis of the book a treatise about how to cope with suffering. We are now enabled to see the book as a life study of how a righteous man should (and perhaps also should not!) wrestle with Satan, the opponent of God. Many disciples have turned to the book of Job believing it to advise on how to cope with suffering and have come away disconsolate, not finding the answers they sought. Are the scriptures truly at fault? God forbid. Perhaps rather the central purpose of the book of Job has been misunderstood and therefore misapplied by those who seek its refuge. I suggest that a principal education of the book of Job will be seen in how to combat the various Satans to discipleship, both those without and those within; as well as the instruction of how

God uses His spiritual priesthood to bring such Satan-infected humans as can be saved to salvation.

Most importantly of all, the interpretation of the Satan actually affects our understanding of who God is. With the understanding that Satan is resident in the three friends, God can no longer be seen as capricious; rather this interpretation allows us to understand most readily the loving work God is performing with humanity. If God is only wreaking havoc in the life of Job to prove to Satan he is wrong, how capricious and heartless is this God! As if God were so insecure that He needed to prove He was right to anyone! God's destructive intervention in the life of Job would then be reduced to a mere "cosmic experiment," as some commentators have labeled it.⁸⁴

But with this interpretation, that the role of the Satan is occupied by the three proud friends, God's Hand is seen to be caring, because, by the end of the book, those same three are brought to salvation. That is to say God's entering into the barter with Satan actually results in God *working an act of salvation* in 'Satan's' lives. This now makes sense that God would get involved, because the salvation of any who could be saved, even whilst they opposed God, has always been His mission:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, [i.e. 'Satan's'] Christ died for us.
(Romans 5:8)

If there had been no salvation to gain from the 'barter' God would never have entered it, nor have entrusted such a

⁸⁴ R. Gordis, *Ibid*, 76

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heavy burden of priesthood from his faithful servant Job. With this interpretation alone, where the very opponents themselves are brought to salvation, both the victory of God and the poignancy of the tale are driven to the maximum! And we see how much trust God invests in Job to bear the necessary burden of suffering which finally results in the salvation that a loving God is working in the lives of his three friends.

This is the Father I recognize.

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Martin Luther King Jr

Chapter 4

The Wilderness Journey

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 - 4.1.2 Weaknesses of the Evidence
for a Fictional Interpretation
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 - 4.6.1 Eliphaz the Temanite, a Child of Abraham
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- 4.7 “Who”: The Righteous Man, Job**
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- 4.8 Reflection**

The Wilderness Journey

In this chapter we seek out the “who, what, when and where” of the book of Job. Our motivation is to better appreciate the spiritual message: the “why” – and, although it may not seem obvious now, by identifying the historical contexts we gain greater insight into the spiritual value of the debate when that storm finally breaks.

We begin with somewhat of an aside, albeit a necessary one. We are obliged to address the question: “Does the book of Job recount real history? Or is the account just a parable?” Alongside this the sister-question: “Does it matter either way?” also needs our attention.

4.1 “What”: Is the Book of Job a Fictitious or Historical Account?

4.1.1 Evidence in Support of the Book of Job as a Parable

The hypothesis that Job is, either in whole or in part, a fictitious poem, related to communicate a divine principle in abstract form, is favored by a number of expositors.^{85,86} In support of this suggestion we identify three points:

1 The dialogue in Job is highly structured. Each of Job’s friends speaks in turn, and Job’s response to each is inserted between. This does not scan as a normal conversation would, but rather exhibits the highly structured form either of a poem, or at least a formal debate.

⁸⁵ G. Gutierrez, “On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, xii, 14

⁸⁶ J. Balchin, “Sitting with Job,” 1998, Rhoswiol Books, Oswestry, UK, 21

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2 The language of each of the speeches is poetic in structure. Here is a typical example of the language from the third, final speech of Eliphaz the Temanite:

“Submit to God and be at peace with him;
in this way prosperity will come to you.
Accept instruction from his mouth
and lay up his words in your heart.
If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored:
If you remove wickedness far from your tent
and assign your nuggets to the dust,
your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines,
then the Almighty will be your gold,
the choicest silver for you.
Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty
and will lift up your face to God.
You will pray to him, and he will hear you,
and you will fulfill your vows.
What you decide on will be done,
and light will shine on your ways.” (22:21-28)

This does not read as spontaneously generated dialogue, but rather as a formally prepared speech.

3 The events that occur at the beginning of the book are so statistically unlikely, and symmetric, as to be indicative of a literary creation, rather than something that actually happened in real life. There are four independent calamities befalling Job’s family, flocks and herds; and from each calamity there is exactly one human survivor. Furthermore, when each of the surviving messengers arrives at Job’s property to deliver his message, they all arrive within a short enough time of each other that no one message can be fully delivered before the next messenger arrives.

4.1.2 Weaknesses of the Evidence for a Fictional Interpretation

1 While it is true the written account of the speeches in Job is highly structured with each antagonist speaking in turn and being replied to in turn (until Job interrupts Bildad's third speech) there are other possibilities which would account for this without necessarily declaring the text a fiction. For example:

- The formality of the culture is strikingly different from 21st century Western culture, in which my experiences are couched. Some Eastern cultures, even of the modern day, mandate a much greater degree of formality in communication than do modern Anglo-based cultures.
- Each of the speeches we read in Job may be formally prepared oratories delivered to Job, as a city elder, in a near courtroom atmosphere.
- The written record we now have may be a poetic reconstruction of speeches or discussions given initially in a more spontaneous format.

2 The existence of a poetic recapitulation of an event is not in itself good reason to suggest the event is necessarily unreal. To the contrary, momentous events in history form natural choices for memorial in poetic framework. To pick just one of literally thousands of examples, I consider the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade, a British assault during the Crimean war against Imperialist Russia. The Light Brigade comprised an assemblage of British light cavalry drawn from various units of Dragoons and Hussars. The Charge was a disastrous military maneuver under Lord Cardigan, during the Battle of Balaclava in October 1854. Approximately 600 British light cavalry, outnumbered by more than eight to one, charged the Russian cannons *from the front* along the length of a valley whose elevated sides were also occupied by hostile battalions. Tennyson immortalized both the ghastly strategy, (later attributed to a miscommunication of orders), and

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deadly imagery of the Charge of the Light Brigade in his eponymous poem, the first two stanzas of which read:

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
“Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismay’d?
Not tho’ the soldiers knew
Someone had blunder’d.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.⁸⁷

Would this poem provoke anyone to suggest that the Charge of the Light Brigade is more likely to be a fictitious event because Tennyson wrote about it in poetic language? Of course not! Likewise the fact that the account of Job exists largely in poetic form is not itself any reason to suggest that the events recorded did not happen in reality.

3 The events concerning the sole surviving servants and their simultaneous arrival delivering their messages are indeed highly statistically improbable. But the book of Job claims this was the deliberate intervention of the Hand of God: the text is

⁸⁷ A. L. Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” 1864

not asking the reader to believe such enormously unusual things happened by chance.

A good comparison can be made with Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, in Moses' day. Consider the statistical improbability of the events detailed in the Exodus record. Moses raises his staff toward the sea and an east wind of sufficient moment begins to divide the waters of the Red Sea, exposing and drying the seabed in a single night! (Exodus 14:21) Yet this wind causes no physical damage to the million or so Israelites camped on the beach. Further, the waters remain divided long enough for every last Israelite to successfully traverse the Gulf – on dry land, no less – and also long enough for every pursuing Egyptian to enter the valley between the walls of water; but not long enough for a single Egyptian to successfully cross to the other side. The statistical unlikelihood of such events is mind-boggling! Certainly the account of the crossing of the Red Sea requires faith on the part of the reader to believe in a powerful and involved God, and that requirement proves too much for some. But if the reader believes in the Biblical account of the Red Sea crossing as an historical event and not an allegorical story, despite the literally miraculous details, it would be inconsistent to conclude that the story of Job must be allegorical because of the equally statistically unlikely events detailed in the opening chapter. In short, if you can believe in a literal Red Sea crossing, you can believe in a literal Job chapter 1.

4.1.3 Evidence in Support of the Book of Job as an Historical Account

1 Although not a strong argument in itself, it is the logical default for a Bible believer to take each account as literal unless the Biblical record itself prompts the reader to adopt a symbolic interpretation (as we have done for the character of the Satan, for example).

2 The prophecy of Ezekiel implies the reality of Job as an historical figure. The Lord says through the prophet:

“I stretch out my hand against [Israel]... even if these three men - Noah, Daniel and Job - were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness,” declares the Sovereign LORD. (Ezekiel 14:20)

Ezekiel mentions Job in the same sentence as Noah and Daniel. While comparisons between legend and reality are often made, it is highly unlikely for anyone to combine a mythical figure with two historical ones as case examples to support an argument. For example, it would be bizarre to support an argument on the subject of charitable works by citing Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Santa Claus as the case studies. Thus Ezekiel strongly implies that Job is as much of an historical figure as Noah and Daniel.

3 Of *critical* importance, the suffering of Job is deprived of any value of solace to readers if it turns out it’s simply a story. For all we have reasoned that the purpose of the book of Job is not necessarily to provide textbook answers on how to cope with extreme suffering; still it is necessarily of comfort to those facing extreme trials in their lives that, in the life of Job, they can reflect on a man who bore much more before them. Consider the different impacts the following quotes have as either real-life testimony from history or merely an invented story:

“If only my anguish could be weighed
and all my misery be placed on the scales!
It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—
no wonder my words have been impetuous.
The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are marshaled against me.” (6:2-4)

“When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’
The night drags on, and I toss till dawn.
My body is clothed with worms and scabs,
my skin is broken and festering.
My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,
and they come to an end without hope.
Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath;
my eyes will never see happiness again.
The eye that now sees me will see me no longer;
you will look for me, but I will be no more.”
(7:4-8)

“Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response;
though I call for help, there is no justice.
He has blocked my way so I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.
He has stripped me of my honor
and removed the crown from my head.
He tears me down on every side till I am gone;
he uproots my hope like a tree.
His anger burns against me;
he counts me among his enemies.
His troops advance in force;
they build a siege ramp against me
and encamp around my tent.
He has alienated my brothers from me;
my acquaintances are completely estranged from
me.” (19:7-13)

If the book of Job is a mere parable, or even if the true facts have been greatly embellished to arrive at this extreme scenario, the impact of the extremity of Job’s suffering is ruined! It becomes a mere conjecture in the mind of an author; something which never actually happened. The loss of actual reality, in the case of extreme suffering, necessarily relates to an

almost total loss of potency in the account. There's no pain in a poem. There might be the same words that a man in pain would have used, but if the genuine historicity of the book – this book in particular! – is absent, its value is destroyed. I'd sooner take the books of first and second Kings as allegorical poetry than Job!

4 James instructs us to behold the perseverance of Job⁸⁸ (James 5:11), as a support to the arguments James is making concerning the need for stamina in discipleship. It's important to remember who James is. In terms of New Testament authors, James is the practical one. When a Christian Bible-study group ask themselves: "Whom can we look to in scripture for real life instruction? Who's the writer who really gets to grips with how we should live as disciples in the cut and thrust of day-to-day life?" it's not long before someone suggests the letter of James, and understandably so. James' basic message is: "Get out there, get on with it, and here's how." So how can Job be fictitious? If the argument James is trying to make is one of encouragement to stay the course, and James himself is focused on the reality of the disciple's walk rather than academic treatise, how can it possibly be an encouragement to any reader if James cites the example of a mythical character who actually never really lived, never really stayed the course in any real sense? James' arguments become absurd unless Job is real.

5 The book of Job contains two lengthy speeches by Almighty God: the longest passages of speech by God anywhere in the Bible! Thus, if the book is actually reduced to being

⁸⁸ The more commonly remembered phrase is the 'patience of Job,' but this derives from an inferior translation of the Greek word. (J. Strong, "A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Greek Testament with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version," in "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance," 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 74.) It is apparent, in fact, that Job is not especially patient, as he himself concedes (6:3), indeed he frequently insists that the Almighty address his concerns immediately. Job does, however, show immense perseverance in his belief that God exists and will restore him.

considered as a poem or myth constructed by human authors, what becomes of these speeches? They are reduced to mere human constructions, like: “Well, I believe that *if* God had spoken, He might have said something like this.” This would render the speeches of God in chapters 38-41 worthless – mere human imitations of the mind of the Maker!

In conclusion, therefore, I determine that the evidence for Job being a fictional work can be effectively rebutted, while the evidence that Job is a genuine recount of history is compelling. The latter three arguments in favor of Job being an historical recount also indicate the importance of the distinction. It is important that Job be understood to be a real historical figure and that the events described in the drama really happened.

4.2 “What”: The Structure of the Discourses

The book of Job is highly structured. Each person speaks in turn and is replied to in turn, as Table 4_1.

It may seem odd that there is a prose beginning and ending attached to the poetic core of the book. But in the same way that “a picture speaks a thousand words,” a single sentence of prose can unravel a thousand lines of poetry. Thus the prosaic beginning very rapidly sets the scene for the main action of the book: the debate between Satan and the righteous man. Likewise, with the debate concluded, and God having made revelation of Himself and His purposes, the epilogue is swiftly conducted in prose style. The prose beginning and ending essentially magnifies the poetic discourses and thus reinforces their centrality to the purpose of the book.

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Prologue (prose) (ch 1-2)	Eliphaz speaks (1) (ch 4-5)	Bildad speaks (1) (ch 8)	Zophar speaks (1) (ch 11)	
Job speaks (ch 3)	Job replies (ch 6-7)	Job replies (ch 9-10)	Job replies (ch 12-14)	
	Eliphaz speaks (2) (ch 15)	Bildad speaks (2) (ch 18)	Zophar speaks (2) (ch 20)	
	Job replies (ch 16-17)	Job replies (ch 19)	Job replies (ch 21)	
	Eliphaz speaks (3) (ch 22)	Bildad speaks (3) (ch 25)	Elihu speaks (ch 32-37)	Epilogue (prose) (ch 42)
	Job replies (ch 23-24)	Job speaks twice (ch 26-28 & 29-31)	GOD Speaks twice (ch 38-39 & 40-41)	

Table 4_1: The high degree of structure in the book of Job.

The speeches that Job makes evidence very interesting trends as the debate proceeds. Initially, he talks quite openly with his friends, reflected in the length of the speeches he makes to them. Yet as the debate continues, the amount he says to them exponentially decreases. By contrast, the length of the three speeches that Job voices generally, to the universe at large, exponentially increases. Furthermore, there is an almost exact 2:1 ratio in the volume of the three speeches, between those delivered specifically and those delivered generally (Figure 4_1).

4.2.1 Job's Speeches

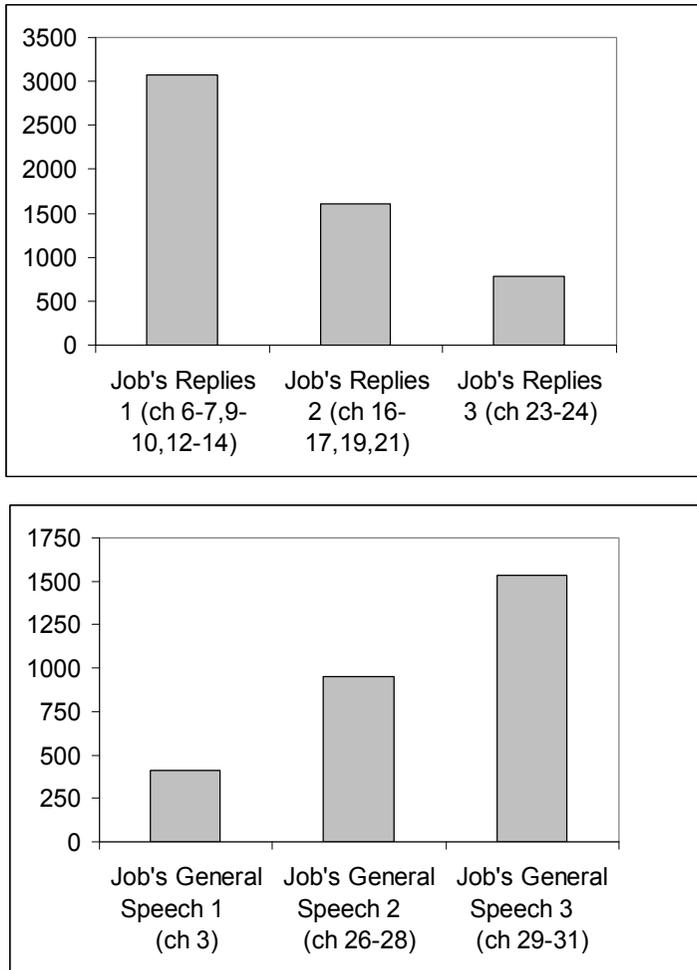


Figure 4_1: Above: The number of words spoken by Job in the three rounds of his replies to Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, which decreases exponentially. Below: The number of words spoken by Job in each of his three general speeches, which increases exponentially.

The speeches of Job are evidently relayed with latent mathematical beauty, which testifies to the great care with which the drama is presented. Are there other lessons we should derive

from the two contrasting trends shown in Figure 4_1? If so, they are hard to determine, but one can certainly see Job's desire to talk with his friends decreases sharply, while his desire to speak per se does not abate. Perhaps this simply underscores the pathos of his position. When the known world of his friends proves inadequate, even hostile, to his need for comfort and support, Job cries out to the unknown world, desperate to find an advocate even be they hidden in the trees or hedgerows.

4.3 “When”: What is the Length and Chronology of the Joban Tale?

4.3.1 How Long does the Book of Job Last?

How long did the suffering of Job last? The whole book can be read in a couple of hours, and often has been in a play setting. But there are cues in the text that suggest Job's suffering was considerably more protracted than this.

Then [the three friends] sat on the ground with [Job] for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. (2:13)

A week passes in this one verse alone. And there are other indications that the ordeal was at least a matter of months:

“He has alienated my brothers from me;
my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.
My kinsmen have gone away;
my friends have forgotten me.
My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger;
they look upon me as an alien.
I summon my servant, but he does not answer,
though I beg him with my own mouth.

My breath is offensive to my wife;
 I am loathsome to my own brothers.
Even the little boys scorn me;
 when I appear, they ridicule me.
All my intimate friends detest me;
 those I love have turned against me.
I am nothing but skin and bones;
 I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth.”
(19:13-20)

These verses indicate several details of suffering which could not have occurred in a time space less than a couple of weeks and most likely occurred over a period of a few months. Job's kinsmen went away from him; his friends forgot him; guests and servants counted him a stranger; intimate friends turned from loving him to detesting him. These things don't happen in days. For close friends to turn from a loving attitude to a cold one, or servants to count him a stranger, would take a few months at least. Additionally, Job reports that physically he is reduced to nothing but 'skin and bones,' a condition which again would not be acquired overnight. Also, Job complains about being ridiculed by the little boys when he appears. The text doesn't explain where Job is appearing, but presumably it is in the public marketplace, the agora, where children played while their parents shopped and bartered. Given the severity of Job's physical condition, it is evident he is not going to venture out in the marketplace for quite a while. When one is desperately sick, one battens down the hatches and takes to bed; and doubtless Job did, initially. But after the same physical condition has persisted for many weeks does one become resigned to its persistent presence. Only then will one venture out, in an effort to return life to a semblance of normality in the face of an evidently chronic condition, and mingle with the populace once more.

4.3.2 Can we Place the Book of Job Historically?

This section will attempt to both place the events of Job in their chronological setting and also address why the chronological timing should matter to appreciating the spiritual thrust of the book. Existing suggestions for the chronology of Job span a wide spectrum; from before the Genesis Flood,⁸⁹ to the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob),^{90,91,92} to as late as the time of Isaiah in the seventh century BC.⁹³

As with solving the character of Satan, we shall primarily draw from other scriptural evidence for our solution.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ T. Longman III, in "The One Year Chronological Bible," 1995, Eds M. Norton and D. Barrett, Wheaton, USA, 15

⁹⁰ E. M. Spongberg, "The Book of Job," 1965, private publication, v

⁹¹ J. V. McGee, "Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job," 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, viii

⁹² J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 5

⁹³ J. E. Hartley, "The Book of Job," in "The New International Commentary on the Old Testament," 1988, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 20

⁹⁴ One seeming clue, which we shall not employ, is the presence of the Hebrew word 'Yahweh,' for God, in the book of Job (e.g. 1:6-7). A natural reading of Exodus 6 suggests the name of 'Yahweh' was not known by any scriptural character until it was first revealed to Moses, just prior to the Exodus.

God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD [Hebrew: Yahweh]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, [Hebrew: El-Shaddai] but by my name the LORD [Hebrew: Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them." (Exodus 6:2-3)

On first consideration therefore, the appearance of the word 'Yahweh' in Job suggests that the book must post-date the chronology of Exodus 6; although other interpretations of Exodus 6 have been offered which are not constrained by this conclusion. Further, the book of Genesis predates Exodus also and the word 'Yahweh' frequently occurs there. Explanations for this are varied and do not overly concern us here. But I will conclude that the appearance of the word 'Yahweh' in Job is no more significant than the appearance of 'Yahweh' in Genesis and cannot therefore be included as objective evidence in dating the book.

1 Contemporary generation length.

After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation.
(42:16)

This is a very useful fact in determining whether Job was before or after the Flood. By referencing the genealogies listed before the Flood (Genesis 5) and afterwards (Genesis 10), one can easily calculate that before the Flood ~410 years are required to see one's fourth generation and ~125 years afterwards. So the fact that 140 years in the life of Job allows him to see four generations of children, but not five, confidently places the life of Job after the Genesis Flood.

2 Names in the book of Job.

The names and genealogies in the book of Job contribute to establishing its chronological placement. We have Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, Elihu the Buzite and the land of Uz: nine names in all, to help us locate the chronological setting of the book of Job. Job's own name does not assist us in this quest because it is unique in scripture, although it is a name whose meaning will open a fascinating line of thinking in a later chapter.

We focus especially on the tribal names: Teman, Shuah, Naaman, Buz and Uz, because they leave a deeper footprint in history than individual names. To our benefit we discover that these names are rare in scripture and thus we are able to identify a single time period in which men bearing these names co-existed.

- The only Teman in scripture is the grandson of Esau (1 Chronicles 1:35-36); four generations subsequent to Abraham. Teman is also specifically detailed as becoming a chief in Esau's family lands (1 Chronicles 1:51-53) and therefore logically 'Teman' would become a tribal name.

- The only Shuah in scripture is Abraham's son through Keturah (Genesis 25:2).
- There are two Naamans:⁹⁵ one is the Syrian commander in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 5), the other is four generations down from Abraham, being Benjamin's son (Genesis 46:21).
- There are three men in scripture named Uz and all are Semites. One is before the time of the Flood (Genesis 10:23), another is Abraham's nephew (Genesis 22:21); the third is a grandson of Seir (Genesis 36:28), which places him approximately four generations after Abraham.
- There are two men named Buz: one is also a nephew of Abraham and the brother of Uz (Genesis 22:21), the other is an early figure in the tribe of Gad (1 Chronicles 5:14), whose exact chronology is difficult to establish.

So the single chronological period in which all five of these names co-exist is the time a few generations after the time of Abraham, as Figure 4_2 clarifies.

Does this place the book of Job at this time, about four generations after Abraham? No, it does not, and some expositors stumble here by finding the names and then automatically assigning the chronology of Job as coincident.^{96,97} Each of the

⁹⁵ Some interpret 'Naamathite' as one deriving from the Syrian city of Naamah, but this is not a closer match to 'Naamathite' than the tribal name Naaman. Personally, I find 'Naaman' the preferable interpretation for three reasons:

- It is consistent with the tribal names of the other two friends, which are also based upon people, not cities.
- Naaman is contemporary with the other characters from whom tribal names are derived in Job.
- Most importantly, and again consistently with our other genealogical derivations, we are using information in the scriptural record. The Syrian city of Naamah is not mentioned in the Bible (it should not be confused with the Canaanite Naamah recorded in Joshua 15:41), but the character of Naaman is. So interpreting Zophar as from Naaman enables the valuable protocol of allowing the Bible to interpret itself.

⁹⁶ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*

principal figures: Teman, Shuah, Naaman, Uz and Buz need first to become *tribal* names before the account of Job begins, not just individual ones, because they appear as tribal names in the Joban tale. This can only be established some significant time after each individual man has lived and his family expanded into a large number of people.

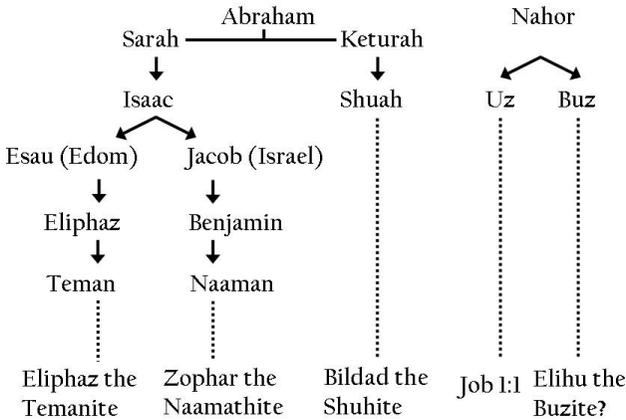


Figure 4_2: Placing the characters in the Joban tale chronologically and genealogically.

Thus from this evidence we can reason that the book of Job takes place chronologically downstream from Abraham.

3 Job's description of the Red Sea crossing

I believe this is the single most important detail in establishing the timing of the book of Job. Job says:

“The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke. By his power he churned up the sea; by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces. By his breath the skies became fair; his hand pierced the gliding serpent.” (26:11-14, NIV)

⁹⁷ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*

At first glance the above quote seems no help in determining Job's chronology; or anything else for that matter! But the prophet Isaiah unambiguously translates this as a reference to the Red Sea crossing. First, Isaiah translates the name Rahab:

“An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev: Through a land of hardship and distress, of lions and lionesses, of adders and darting snakes, the envoys carry their riches on donkeys' backs, their treasures on the humps of camels, to that unprofitable nation, to Egypt, whose help is utterly useless. Therefore I call her Rahab the Do-Nothing.” (Isaiah 30:6-7, NIV)

So “Rahab” is Egypt.⁹⁸

Isaiah assists us further in a later prophecy. He utilizes the same language as Job, but, by saying more than Job does, Isaiah leaves us in no doubt that the language refers to Israel's successful traverse of the Red Sea, where the Egyptians (“Rahab”) are destroyed by God.

“Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?” (Isaiah 51:9-10, NIV)

⁹⁸ The proper name “Rahab” in Isaiah 30:7 (NIV) is translated as the word “strength” by some versions, and can also mean “pride” or “boaster,” which will prove highly symbiotic to the analysis I adopt here. (J. Strong, *Ibid*, 107). Whether the Hebrew word “Rahab” is meant as a word or a proper name, it should not be confused with the name of the female citizen of Jericho “Rahab,” (Joshua 2) whose name is a different word in Hebrew, perhaps better transliterated “Rachab” (*Ibid*, 108).

This is invaluable in dating the chronology of Job. Comparing Job's quote above (26:11-14) with these prophecies of Isaiah, we can see beyond any doubt they are describing the same scenario. Thanks to the extra details Isaiah employs, we can confidently conclude that this scenario is the Red Sea crossing; and thus the book of Job *must* date later than the Exodus from Egypt.

4.3.3 Spiritual Lessons from the Genealogies in Job

Figure 4_2 also reveals our first spiritual gem from the consideration of Joban chronology. We learn that Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite are all children of Abraham. Yet our earlier chapter has identified them as personifying Satan. So, metaphorically, Satan was a son of Abraham! As further striking counterpoint, righteous Job is likely a Gentile. Though Job's exact genealogy is obscured, (I suggest deliberately so, as we shall consider later), we know he is established in the Gentile land of Uz. I'm using the term 'Gentile' as one not descended from Abraham, which is a common usage of this slightly flexible label.⁹⁹

The diagram also shows Elihu the Buzite is a Gentile too – although this observation is complicated. We are also told that Elihu is of the family of Ram (32:2). If this is the same Ram that appears in other scriptures, who is about six generations down from Abraham (1 Chronicles 2:3-9, Matthew 1:1-4), then Elihu is actually an Israelite and a Jew from the tribe of Judah. So we can't be sure whether Elihu is Jew or Gentile. On the one hand the Gentile evidence is slightly stronger because it comes from the placement of a tribal name, not a family name, about which there will be less confusion. On the other hand if Elihu is from the line

⁹⁹ The seventeenth century Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza also concluded that Job was a Gentile; although Spinoza concluded this from the relatively unpopular notion that the text of the book had been translated into Hebrew from an original non-Hebraic language: B. de Spinoza, "Theologico-political Treatise," 1900, in N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 36

of Judah then he is from the same tribe as John the Baptist, with whom we will later find attractive comparisons with Elihu.

But let's not miss the forest for the trees with all these specifics. How fascinating it is that back here in the Old Testament there lies a story of a faithful Gentile persecuted by self-righteous, (unintentionally) Satanic, children of Abraham! This is a wonderful precedent to the principle the Lord Jesus will expound in its fullness: that a person's living faith determines whether they are a spiritual family member, not their genetic background. Jesus was also persecuted, by the Pharisees, who placed confidence in their righteousness because they could trace, or at least assert, a lineage derived from Abraham (John 8:39,53). They could also, so they believed, afford to sneer at Jesus of Nazareth, because it was commonly known he was conceived prior to his mother being married, and they supposed his birth to be 'illegitimate' in this regard. All this is carefully prefigured in the Joban tale.

I wonder if this account forms the basis of John the Baptist's warning to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were very proud of their ancestral heritage reckoned through both Abraham and Moses. John the Baptist, one hailed by Jesus as the greatest born of women (Luke 7:28), reveals to the Pharisees that righteousness comes through an attitude with which life is lived and the subsequent good fruits realized therefrom, not from asserting a genetic relationship to a man who pleased God. One does not ride into the Kingdom of God on the coattails of another, or somehow qualify through the labyrinths of social ingratiation. Interestingly the language John uses to reveal this to them may well be drawn from his knowledge of the book of Job:

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already

at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:7-10)

Given the comparisons between Elihu and John the Baptist (which we will be considering in a later chapter) I wonder if John the Baptist was mindful of Elihu’s position when he uttered these words. John, a godly man doubtless very familiar with his scriptures, would have known that Elihu (who, if from the family of the same Ram mentioned in other scriptures, was from the same tribe as him) was faced by the self-righteous pride of three children of Abraham who had assumed their relationship with God was good, when it was not. So I wonder if reflection on the Joban scriptures prompted the specific content of John the Baptist’s message.

We have reasoned no end-cap on how late the book of Job can be, except that Job lived 140 years after these experiences. Given that he had ten children at the start of this experience, his total age is likely at least 200. The scripture makes clear that God blessed him to live to an unusually advanced age for his generation (42:17). Nevertheless the greater the number of generations Job is away from Abraham, who lived to 175 – also a full age for his generation (Genesis 25:7-8) – then the more extraordinary this age becomes.

So we have confidently established that the chronological setting of Job is some time after the Exodus from Egypt. Additionally, our consideration of the geography of the setting of the book, below, will allow us to further refine our chronological setting for the tale.

4.4 “Where”: Where is the Land of Uz?

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job.
(1:1)

To Speak Well of God

Uz is in the hill country of Seir, a mountainous region south-east of Israel (Genesis 36:20). This region was also populated by the children of Esau, whose alternative name was Edom (Genesis 36:8-9). Jeremiah corroborates this link:

“Rejoice and be glad, O Daughter of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz. But to you also the cup will be passed; you will be drunk and stripped naked.”

(Lamentations 4:21)

So the land of Uz is the hill country south-east of Israel, previously known as the hill country of Seir, and later Edom. (Interestingly Buz, the brother of Uz, also becomes the name of a region: Jeremiah 25:23). But how do three children of Abraham: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, encounter Job in the hill country south-east of Israel?

A readily available solution is that the people of Israel were in the 40 year period in which they wandered in the wilderness, just after the Red Sea crossing. This marries well with three things we have learned:

- Geographically: Uz is in this wilderness region
- Chronologically: the time of Moses is sufficiently late for Teman, Shuah, Naaman and Buz to have become tribal names
- Scripturally: Satan defined his origin as wandering in the Earth (1:7)

Thus, this is the hypothesis I adopt: that Job exists at the time of the wilderness wanderings of Israel. (We will later refine this to suggest it is in the latter part of this journey, toward the end of Moses' life.)

With Satan understood as the spirit of pride extracted from jealous members of the Israelite hoard, whose jealousy and pride is chafed by witnessing settled peoples in the land through

which they are cursed to wander to and fro, this quote is extremely pertinent – even poignant. It fits very naturally with human experience. The people are wandering around homeless, staggering through a wilderness land ill-equipped to support them; indeed they rely on the miraculous provisions of manna and water from the Hand of the Lord.¹⁰⁰ As they wander they see those who are settled with lands; lands marked off with fences for the herds and crops. They see the occasional well for watering flocks, crops rotated in permanent fields, even permanent dwellings for families! They see everything they want, but can't have. Moreover, since Moses has told them they have been promised a land by God, they may also believe they *deserve* to have a settled home. It will be especially irritating to see a very wealthy man, when they themselves don't have even a small plot of land to call their own.

Considering these things, it's very understandable that by "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it" the satanic spirit of jealousy, supposed injustice and injured pride is aroused. Truly Satan is born (again). And in this way the power of the literary device of Satan as the extraction of all the ungodly aspects of the human heart is seen. One can see how the Satan becomes 'supernatural': obviously 'he' outlives any given human because he is reborn in every human heart that fosters pride. Whenever a human conceives in his or her heart to resist God, out of pride-filled preference to serve self rather than God, Satan breathes. He is indeed a long-lived enemy!

¹⁰⁰ Although this is scripturally referenced a 'wilderness' these lands are known to be sparsely inhabited. To a massive hoard such as the wandering Israelite presence, the land would certainly be unable to sustain them, so to them it certainly is a wilderness.

4.4.1 Weaknesses of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar in the Israelite Host

1 Only Zophar the Naamathite is a descendant of Jacob. Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite, though children of Abraham, are not Israelites (see Figure 4_2). So if the Israelites who left Egypt are strictly limited to the descendants of the man Israel (Jacob), then technically Eliphaz and Bildad would not be among them.

2 Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have “homes”:

When Job’s three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. (2:11)

The language of “homes” and an evidently agreed meeting place is more natural with a people who are settled. Further, they are Job’s friends, so their acquaintance with Job: a man clearly settled in a specific geography, runs deep.

4.4.2 Addressing the Weaknesses of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar in the Israelite Host

The first objection above may not be too significant. The reason that the Israelites were in Egypt in the first instance, even before they were enslaved there, is because there was a famine in *all* the surrounding lands, while Egypt alone had food, doubtless by reason of the fertility of the Nile delta. The scriptures are specific about the extensive nature of the famine:

And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world.
(Genesis 41:57)

Thus all the children of Abraham: Israelites, Edomites, Shuhites and others would have relocated to Egypt at that time; along with other nationalities. While living in the land of Egypt it is logical these immigrants would polarize to live together: an effect which is seen to this day in any country where immigrants are drawn in number. When the exodus came, it is also logical that closely related children of Abraham would be among them. Furthermore there is scriptural evidence that the company of the Israelites permanently included “strangers within their gates.” Many of the prescriptions for Israelite customs, for example the keeping of the Passover, were detailed both for the Israelite and resident aliens living with them (e.g. Exodus 12:1-27).

To address the difficulty of the three friends described as having homes, we note that the word “homes” does not preclude Israel being in a time of wandering, for they would still have homes in tents, as did the Lord Himself, albeit temporary ones.

I theorize that the Israelites were resident in one area for a while, long enough to establish friendships with residents, before moving on. We know that they remained settled until the cloud of the Presence of Yahweh was caused to move (Exodus 40:36-37), although no details are given of how long they remained in each station.

4.5 “Where” and “When”: The Joban Tale within the Wilderness Wandering

It’s worth taking a step back from the book of Job and looking at the bigger storyline in which it is couched. I suggest there is a single storyline spread over ~500 years, several countries and seven books of the Bible, which provides a spiritual context for the exchanges in Job. This Big Picture story is shown in Figure 4_3. It depicts a geographically closed loop where Israel leave the house of God (Bethel), travel through a series of refining experiences and, finally, return to the house of God.

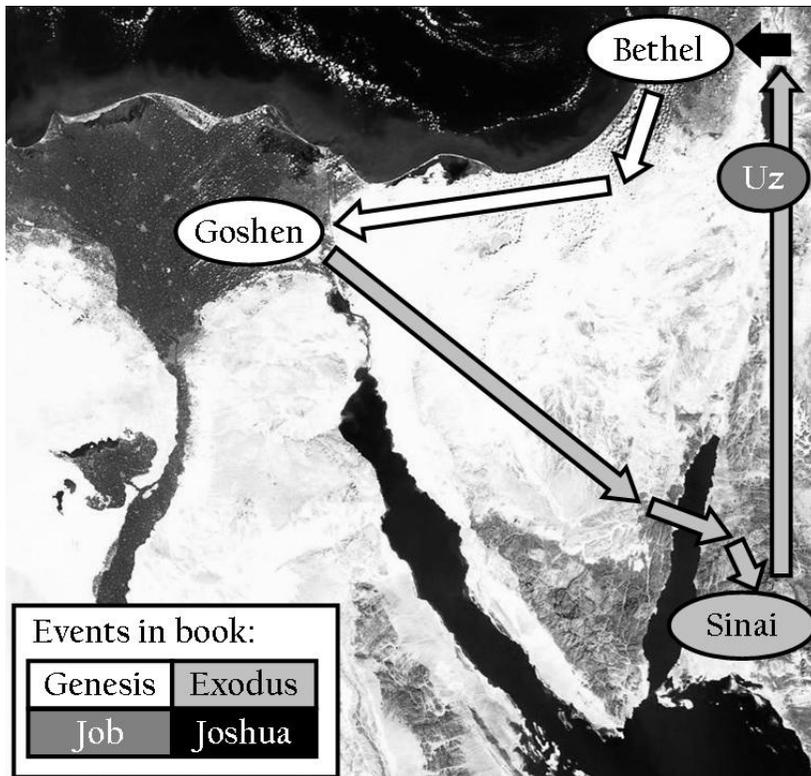


Figure 4_3: The ‘Big Picture’ context of the book of Job: towards the end of the ~500 year closed loop travels of God’s people from Bethel to Bethel.

The story starts when Jacob receives his new name “Israel”: an event which bespeaks the opening of a new chapter, the beginning of a new journey.

Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God”... God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” ...Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel. Then they moved on from Bethel. (Genesis 35:1,10,15-16)

Beth-el translates as “house of God.” Jacob becomes Israel in the house of God, where he builds an altar to Him. It

forms a beautiful scene. “Jacob”: the usurper, the deceiver, has been transformed into “Israel”: a prince with God, when he stands in the House of God. What a fine hope this extends to all of us! But, by the same token, the subsequent action: where Israel departs the house of God, now bears a didactic flavor, and one well mirrored in the spiritual degeneration of the tribes as they descend into Egypt. Israel will not return to the house of God for about 500 years.

After descending into Egypt, ostensibly because of the famine, the Israelites remain there for many generations. Initially they dwell under the favor of the Pharaoh who knew Joseph (Genesis 41-50), but later under the disfavor of the subsequent Pharaoh, who subjugates the immigrant populace as slaves (Exodus 1). God’s compassion frees His people and they depart Egypt under the guidance of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 12). They are chased across the desert by the Egyptian army (Exodus 13), but are delivered through baptism and the destruction of ‘Rahab’ in the Red Sea (Exodus 14, Isaiah 51).¹⁰¹

At Sinai the Israelites received from the Lord the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and the rest of the law and covenants (Exodus 21-24, Leviticus) by which the newborn nation would govern itself. The Israelites are then guided north towards the land promised to them (Numbers, Deuteronomy), until at the very brink of entry they fail in faith. They refuse to take arms against the physically larger incumbents, as God had called them to do, at which sin God directs they return to the wilderness for 40 years until that generation passes (Numbers 14). Eventually, 40 years later and after the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34), the Israelites are led by Joshua into the Promised Land. Once more this is achieved through a miraculous dry land crossing created in the midst of a body of water (Joshua

¹⁰¹ Most likely the Red Sea crossing was across the eastern Gulf of Aqaba, leading to Sinai in the land of Midian (see Figure 4_3) and not as commonly represented on the eponymous peninsula between the gulfs. Later scriptures confirm that Sinai was indeed in Midian (Acts 7:29-30), on the Eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba.

3). After they cross this body of water, their re-baptism, they finally re-enter the house of God: Bethel (Joshua 8). This 500 year closed loop, from Bethel to Bethel, I see as one over-arching 'Big Picture' story of abandonment, travail and redemption. And the drama of Job fits inside it, right at the critical boundary of travail and redemption.

We have seen evidence that the chronology of the book of Job lies during the wilderness wanderings and more specifically, for reasons I will advance later, towards the end of that period. Now by considering this bigger picture of the departure from, and return to, Bethel, we can place the Joban drama on the *spiritual* spectrum. During the wilderness wandering Israel are at their very lowest spiritual ebb. They have been outside of the house of God for about half a millennium. They have recently failed to achieve communion with God through accepting His provision of a homeland; instead they were overwhelmed with human fear of the army that God had assured them He would overcome.

I believe God made the Israelites physically homeless in order to draw attention to their spiritual homelessness. God employs a similar strategy during the time of the prophet Haggai, where He refuses to allow the homebuilding and crop planting of the people to be successful, because they insist on building only their own homes and ignore the rebuilding of the House of the Lord.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You

drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.” (Haggai 1:2-11)

Armed with this knowledge we can better approach the mindset of Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite. They are spiritually debilitated and, while I do not attempt to justify their false doctrine and ultimate lack of compassion, we can now have some understanding of why their arguments are spiritually derelict. Israel has been outside of the House of the Lord for about 500 years. Job, a righteous man and one who feared God and shunned evil (1:2), is about to be confronted by the spiritually homeless; so we can anticipate an acrimonious assault from the three ‘friends.’

From our identification of the Satan as the pride of the three friends, we have concluded that the core of the book centers on the struggle between the Satan and Job. This chapter adds the dimension that this struggle happened in the wilderness. Ergo, the plotline of the Joban drama is Satan confronting a Righteous Man in the Wilderness, to tempt him.

An important theme is emerging.

4.6 “Who”: Satan, The Three Friends’ Pride

We turn our investigation towards the characters of the book, beginning with the three friends: ‘Les Conforteurs Miserables’ (16:2), whom we have already identified as occupying the office of the Satan, i.e. hosting human pride.

4.6.1 Eliphaz the Temanite, a Child of Abraham

Expositors generally assume Eliphaz the Temanite is the eldest of the three friends.^{102,103,104} While there is no direct confirmation of this belief, it is supported by the observation that he speaks first in a culture where the youngest evidently speaks last (32:4). Additionally, at the end of the drama, God addresses the erring trio through Eliphaz the Temanite, as “you and your two friends.” God identifies Eliphaz as the leader of the trio and, though we are not given the basis by which the Almighty makes this discrimination, superior age lends itself as a possible reason.

Eliphaz the Temanite also makes brief reference to the fact that ‘age is on their side’:

“The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your [Job’s] father.” (15:10)

That said, Eliphaz’ comment that the aged are on the side of the three friends is in the third person and may refer to someone other than himself, as we shall consider later.

Eliphaz the Temanite is a child of faithful Abraham and should therefore be a source of the blessing that Abraham received, that in him all nations of the Earth would be blessed

¹⁰² D. Atkinson, “The Message of Job,” 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 41

¹⁰³ R. Gordis, “The Temptation of Job- Tradition versus Experience in Religion,” 1955, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 77

¹⁰⁴ L. G. Sargent, “Ecclesiastes and Other Studies,” 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK, 107

(Genesis 12:3). But Eliphaz is a descendant of Esau (Edom); a people whom the scriptures reveal as ill-disposed towards God's children. Edom's legacy is recorded when Israel had escaped Egypt, i.e. at time of Job, and Israel had asked to pass through Edom's country unmolested:

“This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. Our forefathers went down into Egypt, and we lived there many years. The Egyptians mistreated us and our fathers, but when we cried out to the LORD, he heard our cry and sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt. Now we are here at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.”
(Numbers 20:14-17)

This hospitality Edom harshly rejected, replaced instead with a threat of attack:

But Edom answered: “You may not pass through here; if you try, we will march out and attack you with the sword.” (Numbers 20:18)

I don't want to attribute the sins of the fathers to the children (c.f. Deuteronomy 24:16), but maybe the Bible has left this exchange as prophetic for Eliphaz the Temanite, who tragically fulfills the measure of his forefathers. Far from comforting Job and easing his passage through his personal wilderness, Eliphaz, son of Edom, ends up attacking him.

Initially he is kindly, reassuring Job of his specific good works and his confidence that God's observation of them will lead to Job's restoration.

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“Think how you have instructed many,
how you have strengthened feeble hands.
Your words have supported those who stumbled;
you have strengthened faltering knees.
But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.
Should not your piety be your confidence
and your blameless ways your hope?” (4:3-6)

Yet as the debate continues, his tone reverses and, in his final speech, he flatly contradicts his earlier comments:

“Is not your wickedness great?
Are not your sins endless?
You demanded security from your brothers for no
reason;
you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them
naked.
You gave no water to the weary
and you withheld food from the hungry,
though you were a powerful man, owning land-
an honored man, living on it.
And you sent widows away empty-handed
and broke the strength of the fatherless.
That is why snares are all around you,
why sudden peril terrifies you,
why it is so dark you cannot see,
and why a flood of water covers you.” (22:5-11)

As his Edomite forefathers, Eliphaz the Temanite ultimately displays no pity for the struggles of God’s disciple, adrift in a wilderness of pain and suffering.

4.6.2 Bildad the Shuhite, a Child of Abraham

Bildad the Shuhite is also a child of faithful Abraham, another invested as a blessing to all nations. Yet Bildad is

arguably even less equipped to deliver that blessing to Job than Eliphaz.

We must take care how we describe each of these men, because ultimately they are brought to salvation and will take their places in the Kingdom of God. That said, can we say that Bildad's arguments are tinted with a dash of viciousness? His attack on Job is implied, but the implications are unmistakably clear. Instead of criticizing Job directly, Bildad creates a hypothetical evil character and describes what would befall this character; taking pains to detail the specific calamities Job is suffering. We will explore this evidence in detail in the following chapter focusing on the debate.

Some of Bildad's stabs might well have catapulted a lesser man than Job into near-homicidal rage. Job has been bereaved of all ten of his children (1:18-19), sparking grief doubtless unimaginable for those who have not suffered similarly. Then his 'friend,' Bildad, speculates that the death of all Job's children is just and reasonable (18:19). Sometimes it is hard to empathize with scripture, perhaps our own lives are simply so luxurious, or we are just so lazy, that we do not mentally or emotionally connect with the scriptural characters as well as we should. But Bildad's second speech should strike us as horrifying and would probably incite many of us into an angry, if not violent, reaction!

Bildad's conclusion of Job's circumstances:

“Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man;
such is the place of one who knows not God.”
(18:21)

Yet Job, who had to endure the calamities, not merely witness them, concludes:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;

may the name of the LORD be praised.” (1:21)

“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”
(2:10)

What striking counterpoint! How fascinating that, long before the teaching of the Lord Jesus or the Apostle Paul, there is so powerful a Biblical lesson showing what it is to be a man of faith, and what it is to be merely a child of Abraham.

4.6.3 Zophar the Naamathite, a Child of Abraham, an Israelite, a Jew

Zophar traces his ancestry through the tribe of Benjamin. He is not only an Israelite, but also a Jew (the term Jew deriving from the kingdom of Judah, comprising the two tribes Judah and Benjamin). By bloodline he is the closest to ‘God’s people.’ Yet his commentary shows him as far from salvation as any of the friends. In fact where Eliphaz and Bildad begin with kind words that later sour, Zophar attacks Job from the moment he opens his mouth. He does not display the suavely eloquent, yet ultimately duplicitous, constructions of Eliphaz, nor (mercifully) the vicious streak of Bildad, but he does seem disappointingly pompous. He usurps the position of God to declare:

“Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin.”
(11:6)

Any rational analysis of this statement must conclude Zophar has made various unsustainable assertions here and hence our concern of pomposity. All three friends are firm advocates of the false doctrine of exact retribution, but Zophar gives the clearest expression of it. He simplistically intones:

“Surely [God] recognizes deceitful men;
and when he sees evil, does he not take note?”

...Yet if you devote your heart to him
and stretch out your hands to him,
if you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,
then you will lift up your face without shame;
you will stand firm and without fear.
You will surely forget your trouble,
recalling it only as waters gone by.
...But the eyes of the wicked will fail,
and escape will elude them;
their hope will become a dying gasp.” (11:11-20)

4.7 “Who”: The Righteous Man, Job

Finally the protagonist: the man Job. Referenced in the New Testament (James 5:11) and much extra-Biblical literature, e.g. the Qur’an (Sura 4:163), perhaps the most important thing spoken about Job is that he is God’s servant (1:8 & 2:3). This portrayal should strike us as unusual, for other scriptures intimate God has no servants:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (Acts 17:24-25)

How can Job be servant of the One who is not served by human hands? I suspect the description of Job may be more glowing than we might imagine. Paul’s speech from the Areopagus, quoted above, indicates that the reason God has no servants is because He Himself is the servant, providing everything for His children, even each breath by which we are sustained. So when God terms Job “my servant,” I believe He is

saying is that *Job is in the image of God* (as we are supposed to be, see Genesis 1:26). Job appears as a servant, of mankind, because God is a servant and Job is a very godly man. Hence Job can be useful to serve his fellow man in God's Will – which is precisely how God employs him.

Job has no stated genealogy. The other characters have their genealogy appended: Eliphaz *the Temanite*; Bildad *the Shuhite*; Zophar *the Naamathite*. But for Job, no history is listed. In fact, the contrast is absolute: the three friends are *never* referenced *without* their genealogy, and equally Job is *never* listed *with* a genealogy. In a later chapter I will attempt to suggest there is a spiritually important reason why this is.

4.7.1 The Suffering of Job

We certainly cannot appropriately consider the character of Job without mentioning the extent of his suffering. For our opening scene we find this:

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. (2:8)

It is a pathetic scene. It's likely Job is sitting on a burn-pile on his property: the midden for compost and where wood is burned; and where flesh-based perishable refuse is burned for hygiene reasons. There can be no doubt that Job has a very large property: he is recorded as "the greatest man among all the people of the East" (1:3) and he has extensive flocks and herds. I don't know much about large properties first-hand, but friends of mine in central California had a large property for some years and it contained a separate garbage dump and burn pile, the latter for the flammable refuse, which was obviously where the ashes were found. Traditionally it is argued that Job sits at the refuse dump

of the town,^{105,106,107,108} but this is extremely unlikely. Job still lives at home (19:13-19) so this would seem an unnecessarily cumbersome journey for a very sick man to make on a daily basis, especially if his property is large and it is a couple of miles from his house to the periphery of his own lands. So I feel it likely that the rubbish pile on which Job sits is a burn pile on his property, sufficiently far from the house not to permeate the latter with odors, but sufficiently close for refuse to be deposited without an unnecessary trek. We will see some spiritual relevance to this chosen seating point later.

Job scrapes himself with a piece of broken pottery, and I'm prompted to wonder where this shard came from. If he sits atop a generic garbage pile, that may be self-evident, but the scripture notes he is among the ashes, indicating a burn-pile, and logically ceramic objects are not going to be discarded there, since they are not flammable. So it's possible he is carrying the shard with him, out from his house. Now if I look around my house, there's no readily available shards of pottery. So it's further possible, although we are quite deep into speculation here, that he had to smash one of his possessions to create the sharp edge he needed to scratch his sores. The matter of the shard is not important per se, but reflection on these details does open up a better empathy for Job's terrible condition.

The piercing cries Job emits reveal that the full five arenas of the human experience: physical, emotional, social, intimate and spiritual; have all been devastated.

1 Physical suffering.

“When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’

The night drags on, and I toss till dawn.

¹⁰⁵ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*, 27

¹⁰⁶ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 13

¹⁰⁷ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 34

¹⁰⁸ D. Baird, “The Education of Job,” 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 47

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My body is clothed with worms and scabs,
my skin is broken and festering.” (7:4-5)

2 Emotional suffering.

“If only my anguish could be weighed
and all my misery be placed on the scales!
It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas-
no wonder my words have been impetuous.
The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God’s terrors are marshaled against me.” (6:2-4)

3 Social suffering from being ostracized and ridiculed.

“But now they mock me,
men younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to put with my sheep dogs.
...And now their sons mock me in song;
I have become a byword among them.
They detest me and keep their distance;
they do not hesitate to spit in my face.”
(30:1,9-10)

4 Intimate suffering: the loneliness of being distanced from spouse and family.

“My breath is offensive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own brothers.” (19:17)

5 Spiritual suffering: the most keenly felt of all by righteous Job, the spiritual loneliness of apparent abandonment by God.

“But if I go to the east, [God] is not there;
if I go to the west, I do not find him.

When he is at work in the north, I do not see him;
when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of
him.

But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

My feet have closely followed his steps;

I have kept to his way without turning aside.

I have not departed from the commands of his lips;

I have treasured the words of his mouth more
than my daily bread.

But he stands alone, and who can oppose him?

He does whatever he pleases..." (23:8-13)

"He throws me into the mud,

and I am reduced to dust and ashes.

I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer;

I stand up, but you merely look at me.

You turn on me ruthlessly;

with the might of your hand you attack me.

You snatch me up and drive me before the wind;

you toss me about in the storm." (30:19-22)

Perhaps what highlights Job's desperation is his contradictory comments about desiring God's presence. At some points, his most fervent desire is to be hidden from God, where he can be protected from the pain that he knows the Lord is bringing.

"I despise my life; I would not live forever.

Let me alone; my days have no meaning.

What is man that you make so much of him,

that you give him so much attention,

that you examine him every morning

and test him every moment?

Will you never look away from me,

or let me alone even for an instant?” (7:16-19)

Yet at other times, with equal but opposite intensity, he desires nothing more than to be reunited with the Father from whom he feels distanced.

“How I long for the months gone by,
for the days when God watched over me,
when his lamp shone upon my head
and by his light I walked through darkness!
Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,
when God’s intimate friendship blessed my
house,
when the Almighty was still with me
and my children were around me,
when my path was drenched with cream
and the rock poured out for me streams of olive
oil.” (29:2-6)

Without doubt both contradictory desires are completely true. His pain thrusts him away from God, yet his faith propels him towards Him. This is how we find Job, roughly tugged in opposite directions; rent between his theology and his experience.

We are in no position to regard any shortcomings of Job that his ensuing struggle with Satan may reveal until we have taken good time to reflect on the magnitude and range of the assaults which the Satan has caused to be brought against him. These dire scenarios produced Job’s early wail of utter regret over his very existence and his cursing of the day he came into being.

“May the day of my birth perish,
and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’
That day- may it turn to darkness;
may God above not care about it;
may no light shine upon it.

May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more;
 may a cloud settle over it;
 may blackness overwhelm its light.
That night- may thick darkness seize it;
 may it not be included among the days of the year
 nor be entered in any of the months.
May that night be barren;
 may no shout of joy be heard in it.
May those who curse days curse that day,
 those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.” (3:3-8)

The last phrase is interesting. I don't know what beast Job conceptualized as Leviathan, but it's likely he referenced a mythical sea beast similar to Western culture's land-based legendary dragon. Other scriptures support this: Leviathan is recorded as a sea-beast (Psalm 104:25-30) and is used as a symbol of Egypt (Psalm 74:10-15) and Babylon (Isaiah 27:1). A signature feature of these two nations is that they enslaved God's people and mistreated them. Leviathan is therefore an *opponent* of God and, as the fascinating tale of Job unfolds, God will speak particularly about him. Combating Leviathan will form a central feature of the Joban tale, even if, like the Satan, his name only surfaces infrequently. In fact, Job's fateful call to rouse Leviathan will come back to haunt him because, as we shall see, his unwise wish is going to be granted.

4.7.2 The Mystery of 'Go'el'

Underlying his cries, rests the adamant faith of Job. The faith driven by the perseverance of which James speaks (James 5:11).

“Oh, that my words were recorded,
 that they were written on a scroll,
that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead,
 or engraved in rock forever!

I know that my Redeemer [Hebrew: Go'el] lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes- I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!" (19:23-27)

Many scholars have struggled to understand who the "Redeemer" is, of whom Job speaks, and I likewise struggle. Rowley denotes this verse "one of the most cryptic passages in the book."¹⁰⁹ The reference to "God" in the following verse suggests the Redeemer of the previous verse is a different person, since a different title is used. On the other hand it is characteristic in Hebrew to switch between titles, even grammatical persons, mid-speech,¹¹⁰ so this does not preclude the Redeemer being God; and indeed many expositors ultimately arrive at that conclusion.^{111,112,113,114}

Some expositors suggest that Job's words profess, or imply, an understanding of the resurrection.^{115,116,117} Job's belief in seeing God 'in his flesh,' yet after his skin has been destroyed,

¹⁰⁹ H. H. Rowley, "From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament," 1963, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 126

¹¹⁰ A multitude of examples exists for the shift of grammatical persons in Hebraic scriptures when talking to/about the same character. I note one from Jonah's prayer to make the point. Observe in the prayer how the person of God is shifted from second to third person even in the same sentence:

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:
"In my distress I called to the LORD, [3rd person]
and he [3rd person] answered me.

From the depths of the grave I called for help,
and you [2nd person] listened to my cry." (Jonah 2:1-2)

¹¹¹ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 65

¹¹² D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 93

¹¹³ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 59

¹¹⁴ L. G. Sargent, *Ibid*, 116

¹¹⁵ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 60

¹¹⁶ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 155

¹¹⁷ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*, 109

sounds common with that belief. But considering the full range of comments Job makes concerning death and the grave, I lean away from this conclusion.

In his first reply to Eliphaz the Temanite, Job speaks with clarity of his belief that the grave [Hebrew: Sheol] is the place of no return.

“As a cloud vanishes and is gone,
so he who goes down to the grave does not
return.
He will never come to his house again;
his place will know him no more.” (7:9-10)

This is a very matter of fact statement. One does not return from the grave, in Job’s opinion. He speaks further on this same topic in his second reply to Eliphaz:

“Where then is my hope?
Who can see any hope for me?
Will it go down to the gates of death?
Will we descend together into the dust?”
(17:15-16)

Again, the language here suggests Job does not believe that hope can overcome the grave. Furthermore, Job comments in his first reply to Zophar the Naamathite:

“At least there is hope for a tree:
If it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its new shoots will not fail.
Its roots may grow old in the ground
and its stump die in the soil,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth shoots like a plant.
But man dies and is laid low;

he breathes his last and is no more.” (14:7-10)

This is conclusive that he believes there is no hope for a man after death. Yet later in the same speech, when Job speaks of the grave, he says:

“If only you would hide me in the grave
and conceal me till your anger has passed!
If only you would set me a time
and then remember me!
If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my hard service
I will wait for my renewal to come.” (14:13-14)

Here Job speculates on the possibility of surviving the grave, of only being contained there for a temporary period. He uses the intriguing word “renewal” (Hebrew: *chaliyphah*: change, release, renewal¹¹⁸) which seems indicative of resurrection.

In total we have five passages where Job comments on death and the grave, as shown above. A natural reading of 19:25-27, aligned with 14:13-14, suggests Job believes in resurrection. But his comments in 7:9-10; 14:7-10 and 17:15-16 are best read with the opposite inference. What then should we conclude?

Personally, I conclude that Job does not (yet) hold a belief in the doctrine of resurrection. The three comments where he speaks of death as final yield very little room for maneuver in their interpretation, where the other verses, where Job does seem to believe in resurrection, do have latitude to be interpreted either way. The verses in 14:13-14, for example, are spoken in a hypothetical voice. Job speaks with yearning hyperbole: “Could I be merely hidden in the grave?” Job voices as an ‘if only’ tone. By contrast his comments speaking of the grave as the place of no

¹¹⁸ J. Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version,” in “Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance,” 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 39

hope, and from which one does not return, are very direct and offer no option for different interpretations.

Thus I conclude Job does not (yet) perceive a hope beyond the grave and his comments in chapter 19 refer to his belief that God will restore him in his present lifetime.

By contrast, those who see the resurrection in the Job 19 passage sometimes go further and explicitly suggest Job refers to Jesus of Nazareth as the Redeemer.^{119,120} This postulate has been circulated as early as the fifth century AD by Jerome,¹²¹ but this is evidently more than the text claims. Furthermore, since Job speaks about his Redeemer being alive in the present tense, yet speaks of his restoration in the future tense, this would most logically require Jesus being alive in Heaven at the time Job is speaking; an assertion consistent with many variants of Christian doctrine, again dating back as early as Jerome; but not my own. I am convinced the scriptural message communicates that Jesus' life began at his mortal birth (Luke 1:35).

Some expositors suggest that Job refers to God in the first mention in the sentence, but Jesus in the second. For the Trinitarian expositor,¹²² who believes God and Jesus are the same being, this marries well, but for the non-Trinitarian,¹²³ the verse is required to be read as: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end *someone else* will stand upon the earth," which to me is unconvincing. I conclude the Redeemer of whom Job speaks is not Jesus of Nazareth.

Who then is this Redeemer? The Hebrew word we are focusing on: Go'el, a participle of the primary root Ga'al,¹²⁴ is usually understood to mean 'redeemer' and it is translated that

¹¹⁹ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 157

¹²⁰ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 94-95

¹²¹ Jerome, "To Pammachus against John of Jerusalem," in "A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church," 1893, Ed. P. Schaff & H. Wace, Kessinger, Kila, MT, USA, 424-447

¹²² D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 93-94

¹²³ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 155-157

¹²⁴ J. Strong, *Ibid*, 25

way here in the book of Job and in a host of other scriptural passages (e.g. Leviticus 25:25, Isaiah 63:16). Interestingly, however, it can also mean ‘avenger’ (e.g. 2 Samuel 14:11). So Go’el is one who sets the record straight, whether performing an upbuilding act of redemption or a destructive act of vengeance. Which does Job seek? It is not clear. On the one hand he evidently seeks what he understands to be justice in release from his suffering. Does he seek vengeance against God? Likely not, considering the verses that follow, but we cannot dismiss the possibility as quickly as we may wish, since he seeks deliverance from the assaults he weathers and Job correctly deduces that, with the exception of the hapless moralizing of his proud friends, these assaults are coming from the Lord.

Job had made reference to an advocate in an earlier speech. Here the language suggests more clearly that the advocate is a person distinct from God; appealing to God on Job’s behalf.

“O earth, do not cover my blood;
 may my cry never be laid to rest!
Even now my witness is in heaven;
 my advocate is on high.
My intercessor is my friend
 as my eyes pour out tears to God;
on behalf of a man he pleads with God
 as a man pleads for his friend.” (16:18-21)

The Hebrew words for ‘witness,’ ‘advocate’ and ‘intercessor’ are all different from ‘Go’el’ which appears in the Redeemer passage. But they are clearly presented as synonyms with each other and conceptually synonymous with ‘Go’el’ too, since Job is speaking on the same topic of pleading for one to represent, defend and vindicate him.

So who then is this advocate? Who is pleading with God?

I suggest Job references God’s knowledge of his own life, which is ‘hid with God’ (c.f. Colossians 3:3). Paul’s quote in his

letter to the Colossian Christians teaches us that God's Omniscience in Heaven incorporates a total awareness and memory of everyone's life and being: their true character. I suggest Job is saying that God's unerring knowledge of his own blameless life will appeal to God. Job firmly believes in God's goodness, so Job believes God will not disregard the appeal of his blameless life forever and thereby He will choose to restore him. This suggestion is similar to that of Clines,¹²⁵ with whom Balchin tentatively agrees,¹²⁶ although the latter comments that more justification is needed. I attempt that in the following.

There is scriptural evidence for the idea of someone's life appealing directly to God irrespective of the conscious words or actions of the person. The precedental case is Abel. God reveals to Cain that Abel's own life, even in death, was the witness, the advocate, that 'cried out' to God to avenge the Earthly injustice before Him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (Genesis 4:9-10)

'Blood' is introduced as a metaphor for 'life' very early in the Bible (Genesis 9:4-5) and that scriptural symbolism is maintained throughout both Testaments, (e.g. Leviticus 17:11, John 6:53). This strongly supports the proposal that Abel's life (i.e. blood) is the Go'el whom God hears.

One of John's apocalyptic visions strengthens this suggestion. John looks into heaven and sees this vision:

¹²⁵ D. J. A. Clines, "Job," 1989, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol I, Dallas, TX, USA, 390

¹²⁶ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 175

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (Revelation 6:9-10)

In what way are the saints in heaven? Some Christian doctrine supposes that the immortal souls of the dead saints physically travel to Heaven and are literally appealing to God. It is not our place here to digress into a discussion of fundamental doctrine, but suffice to say I have long been persuaded that the Bible teaches that man *is* a soul, not *has* a soul.¹²⁷ Nevertheless the scripture says the saints are in Heaven in some way. I utilize the previously cited case of Abel, whose blood (life) cries out to God after he was dead, to understand this apocalyptic scene. The lives (souls) of the saints, i.e. all their thoughts, deeds, hopes and expectations, are clearly laid out before, and accessible to, the mind of the Almighty in Heaven, whether the saints themselves are living, dead, or yet unborn. What is especially fascinating, and directly applicable to our case in Job, is that the ‘souls in Heaven’ in the Revelation passage are also acting as “Go’el.” They are petitioning God to take note of their martyrdom, and avenge and redeem them.

Thus I understand the Go’el of whom Job speaks in the same way as the Revelation vision: as a personification of Job’s life within God’s awareness – another saint in Heaven, if you will.

By analogy, imagine an occasion where someone has spread a slanderous story about you to a close friend. You are desperate to contact that friend and correct the impression they may have. But you are unable to reach them; they’re simply not picking up the phone, for example. Your failure to establish

¹²⁷ I believe that the Biblical word and concept of the “soul” is essentially a synonym for “life” and is extinguished upon the collapse of the mortal consciousness (c.f. Genesis 2:7 & Psalm 104:29-30)

contact continues for an interminable period. This is the position Job feels he has got to with God: God's not picking up the phone. Eventually, one might get to the point where one says: "My good friend knows who I am. Their knowledge of the real me has to convince them I've committed no heinous wrong, no matter what they've heard." I think that's where Job is with God.

This interpretation allows us to understand how Go'el is alive in Heaven at the time Job speaks and also how he both is - and isn't - God. It allows us to understand how Job can have some relief, for even though he feels God will not speak to him, Go'el allows him an indirect line to the Almighty's ear. It also does not deprive God of ultimate control, for this Go'el is God's knowledge of the life Job has lived. Go'el is not a sentient creature who can enact anything. He can only advocate in the presence of the One who always hears; the choice to bring redemption, or not, remains with God alone. It also explains who will stand upon the Earth in the last day (19:25): righteous Job, the life restored by God.

4.8 Reflection

We've trekked through a lot of material in this chapter! One of the most important, if potentially surprising, things to conclude, is that we should not desire to castigate the three friends. A vital outcome of the book is that the suffering of Job results in their salvation. This forms just one of a few good answers to the eternal, often outraged, question: "What was God doing with poor Job?!" Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite will take their places in the Kingdom of God at the return of Christ, *precisely because of* the work of God performed through the suffering of His faithful servant Job. Ergo we would be very foolish, and equally very uncharitable, to pour scorn upon these three men. We don't see these men in the finest hour of their discipleships, for sure, but in that God creates a

plan to sculpt their salvation, we must be acutely mindful of what we are seeing. We are witnessing our stumbling brothers guided by the eternally gentle Hand of the Father toward the salvation they nearly, in their proud folly, abandoned. In short, we see ourselves! Maybe that allows us to humanize these three accusers somewhat.

Eliphaz the Temanite seems to be the kindest of the three speakers. This may also be advanced in favor of his superior age, since compassion can be a faculty which develops with age, as the grace of God is more keenly perceived (e.g. John 8:7-9). I also see Eliphaz as the wisest of the three speakers, and the one who is acknowledged as wisest amongst them. But, from the declining progression of his manner, I speculate Eliphaz has grown *accustomed* to his reputation for sagacity. He is, I theorize, familiar with receiving praise and honor as an established elder. He is used to his advice being followed and his commentary applauded; and this forms a danger for him. When he is not lauded by Job, but rather his thinking is contradicted and criticized, his genteel manner disintegrates.

I sense that Bildad the Shuhite is not as well-educated as Eliphaz. With less acumen to apply in debate, therefore, Bildad may feel a little intellectually insecure and so, when he sees that his compatriots' arguments are not convincing Job, or perhaps fears that Job's rebuttals make good sense, he seems to lash out a little. Again, Bildad is not irrecoverably wicked. But the relatively minor flaw of insisting on being seen as correct, combined with having insufficient mental resources to achieve that lofty goal, can have devastating consequences on both Bildad's own discipleship and his ability to be a strength and comfort to his fellows.

Zophar the Naamathite seems to be the youngest of the three friends. I hypothesize this from his style of his speech, the fact he speaks last and from the rather more obvious flaws in his reasoning. Of the three friends, Zophar is the one who doesn't show Job any kindness, except for the commendable seven day

silent vigil all three friends held with Job. Zophar's arguments, the least well constructed, begin immediately on the offensive. It's even possible Zophar is seeing an opportunity for social advancement because of the presence of the renowned elder Eliphaz the Temanite; perhaps in his presence Zophar is keen to speak in a way he envisages as forthright and powerful.

All this makes Zophar a particularly easy target for our criticism. But again, it would prove a grave error for us to lambast this man. Zophar the Naamathite is not unrepentantly dedicated to wickedness, as Cain, or Jezebel, whom we may more justifiably renounce. Nor is he a man whose failings are known to have led to oblivion, as Judas Iscariot. Zophar is a man for whom God has a plan of salvation – indeed we are reading about it in this very book! So while Zophar may be one of the least impressive disciples we see in the scriptures, we should take care not to scorn and reject him. Ironically to do so, to show a lack of sympathy with a brother we believe to have morally erred, would be to repeat the very error we will see him make with Job! Jesus reminds us of the great love the Father holds for even those parts of His creation which seem insignificant:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)

Even the sparrows, whom Jesus states are worth much less than a human life, are all remembered and provided for by the loving care of our Father. This is a vital teaching for us to remember.

Especially when we realize the Hebrew word for “sparrow” is “zophar.”¹²⁸

¹²⁸ To be precise, the words “zophar” and “sparrow” are cousins. The primary Hebrew root “zaphar,” (J. Strong, *Ibid*, 101) means “hopping about, departing

In contrast to the friends, stands the man Job. Faith is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1) and could this principle be portrayed any clearer than in God's faithful servant Job? Everything that appears before Job's eyes, every event that has recently impacted his life, provides all the evidence he needs to conclude that God is either non-existent, indifferent or cruel; the very conclusion reached by a host of expositors of the book. Yet Job perseveres. He believes.

What is so compelling about the character of Job, what is such an inspiration for any disciple, is the nature of redemption Job earnestly desires from his critical condition. His condition is obviously dire; his desire for restoration keen indeed. But what is striking is the *nature* of the restoration he seeks.

“I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!” (19:25-27)

He yearns to be reunited with his God! That's what he misses most.

I had the privilege to be in South Africa at the beginning of 2008, as part of a church mission which had been launched to redress the significant loss of members sustained there from emigration in 1995, when the country's economy and security was destabilized by the (otherwise much welcomed) dissolution of the apartheid regime. Our South African members were reaching out into the formerly segregated township areas and at one point I found myself happily engaged with a prayer group of about 20 children aged between eight and fifteen, in the massive Umlazi

early” and leads to the derivations: “zophar,” translated “departing early” (Ibid, 99) and “zippor,” translated “sparrow” (Ibid, 101).

township in south Durban. Though these Zulu children were not suffering as badly as Job, they certainly did not enjoy the life of relative luxury experienced by so many other children in Western society, or even children (of necessarily different ethnicity) living just outside the township's boundary. They had nothing in the way of toys or possessions; even the church was only a slab of concrete under a canvass 'Big Top' tent, with a ramshackle trailer alongside. I asked each child to choose one thing for which he or she would pray. One child said: "no more death," one said: "that my friend can walk with his legs." Several said: "a large family." This was culturally strange to me; my instincts would have prompted me to limit my number of dependents were I in their circumstances, but I learned dependents in that environment are potential sources of status and income, even defense. Some children said: "a home": a chilling reminder of the lack of even basic stability that many of these young ones coped with daily. One boy wanted: "lots of money," causing me to smile at his honesty. The very next child, perhaps thus prompted, said: "lots of fast cars," another: "to be able to fly," another: "to be the best soccer player." The last child to speak said, in a startling facsimile of Job's own desire: "Every man should be with his God." I was caught completely unprepared for this response ('gobsmacked' being the irreplaceable British idiom), only recovering enough poise to commend the spiritual excellence of his comment. He was just ten years old.

So it is with blameless Job. He offers no prayer for his physical recovery, despite his intense and persistent pain. He doesn't appeal to God for his repulsive skin to clear up, or even for a single night of restful and restorative sleep (a need even any new parent might keenly recognize). Nor does he plead for reintegration into the society of his friends and family, from which he is currently shunned. He does not even argue for justification before 'Les Conforteurs Miserables' by whom he is persistently assaulted and understandably incensed.

He wants his God.

To Speak Well of God

The stage is now set. The Joban tale has led us into the wilderness. Metaphorically many wildernesses converge here: the literal landscape of Uz, the spiritual homelessness of a people whose faith is waning and the desolate wasteland of a stricken man's soul. We have met the participants of the drama and realize they are only three: God, the Satan and the Righteous Man. The natural dynamics of these characters will unfold into one of the most poignant dramas recorded in literature. By the organization of the Spirit, the righteous man will be tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

I believe we're tested too, if only by proxy. Tested simply by what we read happening in this wilderness: a God of whom we desire to speak well, yet whom we see afflicting His own disciple. And tested by a thousand subsequent Satans who will slander Him, and any man who speaks well of Him, precisely because of what will follow here.

In all these senses then, the field is set and we must be ready. Battle is about to commence.

“We have just enough religion to make us
hate, but not enough
to make us love one another.”

Jonathan Swift

Chapter 5

Satan in the Wilderness: The Debate

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5.4 Reflection

5.5 The Debate's Conclusion: The Subpoena

Satan in the Wilderness: The Debate

One of the characteristic difficulties associated with expositions of the main debate between Job and his three friends, in my opinion, is the level of detail. It tends to be either too much or too little. Some expositors talk through the debate line by line, which generates a large volume of text which is perhaps comforting to the expositor that he's been at work, yet doesn't necessarily explain anything of what the debate is really doing. By contrast, other expositors barely quote word one from the debate, but simply agglomerate all of the speeches in hand-waving terms, speaking of Job's rectitude and his opponents' folly. In fairness, a definite progression is hard to identify. The questions and answers seem circular and, though we are aware Job is ultimately exonerated and his friends rebuked, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between one of Job's speeches and one from his friends!

I attempt to find a middle ground where on the one hand the details of the debate are not overlooked, yet on the other hand there is not an over-focus on the nitty-gritty of each accusation and rebuttal so that we spiral downwards into a miasma of details and can't see the bigger picture.

First, let's remind ourselves of the debate's structure (Table 5_1). At first glance there appear to be eight speeches from the friends, each with a response from Job. But on closer examination Bildad's third speech is clearly truncated. The speech is less than 15% of the average length of any of the friends' speeches, strongly suggesting Job has cut Bildad off before he got going. This leaves us with only seven complete speeches from the friends.

Eliphaz speaks (1) (ch 4-5)	Bildad speaks (1) (ch 8)	Zophar speaks (1) (ch 11)
Job replies (ch 6-7)	Job replies (ch 9-10)	Job replies (ch 12-14)
Eliphaz speaks (2) (ch 15)	Bildad speaks (2) (ch 18)	Zophar speaks (2) (ch 20)
Job replies (ch 16-17)	Job replies (ch 19)	Job replies (ch 21)
Eliphaz speaks (3) (ch 22)	Bildad speaks (3) (ch 25)	
Job replies (ch 23-24)	Job interrupts, and speaks twice (ch 26-28 & 29-31)	

Table 5_1: The structure of the debate between Job and the three friends.

Why does Job interrupt? He has shown amazing perseverance to persist with his accusers as long as he has, so we're caused to wonder why he breaks in when he does. There are a few possible answers. One immediate suggestion is simply because Bildad starts repeating ground that has already been explicitly covered. As early as the first speech and rebuttal we find this exchange:

Eliphaz: “Can a mortal be more righteous than God?
 Can a man be more pure than his Maker?”
(4:17)

Job: “Indeed, I know that this is true.
 But how can a mortal be righteous before
God?” (9:2)

Bildad, in his third, truncated, speech, repeats exactly the same point:

Bildad: “How then can a man be righteous before God?
 How can one born of woman be pure?”
(25:4)

This may provide one simple explanation of why Job could not listen any longer. That said, as we deepen our analysis we will uncover additional, perhaps more compelling, reasons why Job breaks in at this point.

5.1 The Doctrine of Retribution Revisited

Each of the friends is a firm believer in the doctrine of retribution: the idea that good deeds are rewarded by material blessings and evil deeds are punished with illness and suffering. It is a false doctrine that seems naturally inherent in every human psyche to a greater or lesser degree, and it is to be purged from any who would discover truth concerning either the operation of the world, or God within it.

In each of the seven complete speeches of the friends, we can find at least one statement, and usually several, which indicate the presence of this doctrine. Here are the proofs:

Eliphaz the Temanite

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Speech 1 | “Who, being innocent, has ever perished?
Where were the upright ever
destroyed?” (4:7) |
| Speech 2 | “For the company of the godless will be
barren,
and fire will consume the tents of
those who love bribes.” (15:34) |
| Speech 3 | “you sent widows away empty-handed |

and broke the strength of the
fatherless.
That is why snares are all around you,
why sudden peril terrifies you”
(22:9-10)

Bildad the Shuhite

- Speech 1 “When your children sinned against him,
he gave them over to the penalty
of their sin.” (8:4)
- Speech 2 “The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out;
the flame of his fire stops
burning.” (18:5)

Zophar the Naamathite

- Speech 1 “if you put away the sin that is in your
hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your
tent...
you will surely forget your trouble,
recalling it only as waters gone
by.” (11:14,16)
- Speech 2 “[the wicked man’s] food will turn sour in
his stomach;
it will become the venom of
serpents within him.” (20:14)

What is signature about this doctrine is the immediacy of the reckoning. Eliphaz and Bildad speak explicitly of events in Job’s life as the necessary consequences of sins Job has committed. Zophar’s final metaphor concerning food likewise implies consequences that are immediate, on the timescale of the digestion of a meal! I’m not suggesting Zophar is insisting that all retribution occurs on so rapid a timescale, but it is indicative of

his mindset that the metaphor he chose, of eating food, is one where consequences are generally realized within an hour or two.

We saw earlier (chapter 2) that the principal errors of the doctrine of retribution are:

- a failure to recognize that there are sources of suffering other than divine punishment
- a failure to recognize that God's definition of innocent and guilty is not necessarily known to us
- a failure to recognize that God's judgment is only fully completed in the eternal timeframe

So why did the three friends all adhere to this foolish doctrine? We could postulate that they were merely far less intelligent than we are, but that would be extremely arrogant, and thereby, ironically, a duplication of the attitude they held. Surprisingly, the chronology of the Joban story suggests an intriguing explanation.

5.1.1 The Prophecy of Moses

The events of Job are set in the wilderness wandering of Israel: at Israel's darkest hour. For 500 years or more they have been departed from Bethel, the house of God, and have been recently rejected from entry into the Promised Land by reason of their lack of trust in the One who had led them and fed them all the way to its border. Towards the end of the wilderness wandering, towards the end of Moses' life, Moses channels a prophecy from God, recorded in Deuteronomy 28, which gives a concise recapitulation of principles that have been expounded in all parts of the law to date. The prophecy is symmetric. Essentially it lists a series of blessings which will be received by the people if they are obedient, combined with their precise inverse curses if the people are disobedient. A compressed version of the prophecy is given below.

To Speak Well of God

“If you fully obey (/do not obey) the LORD your God and carefully follow (/do not carefully follow) all his commands I give you today, all these blessings (/curses) will come upon you and accompany (/overtake) you:

- You will be blessed (/cursed) in the city and blessed (/cursed) in the country.
- The fruit of your womb will be blessed (/cursed), and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.
- Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed (/cursed).
- You will be blessed (/cursed) when you come in and blessed (/cursed) when you go out.”

(Deuteronomy 28:1-19, compression)

This prophecy will be ringing in the ears of all those traveling in the Israelite host, in which host we have reasoned Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are traveling. So perhaps we can be more sympathetic to them falling victim to the false doctrine of retribution at this particular point in history. The doctrine is false, but it is easy to see from the prophecy of Moses how the listeners could fall into the trap of believing it. In fact at first reading the prophecy of Moses seems to justify the doctrine of retribution explicitly!

Further, let’s notice just how closely the events befalling Job happen to match the *specific* parameters singled out for blessing or cursing in the prophecy of Moses.

I suggest the data in Table 5_2 allows us to be a little more specific about Job’s chronology and understand it as towards the end of the wilderness journey, when the prophecy of Moses had just been heard. This would explain why Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have such unwavering confidence in their argument that Job’s suffering must be linked to wrongdoing; if they’ve just heard the prophecy of Moses (Deuteronomy 28), which is so easily misunderstood as the doctrine of retribution. It

would make sense that they would be so confident that they had just seen Moses’ prophecy fulfilled before their very eyes in Job! This might allow us to have some sympathy with the friends’ wrong conclusion that Job had sinned. Indeed when Eliphaz says: “The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father” (15:10), it may even be the aging Moses, approaching 120, whom Eliphaz is referencing, for certainly Moses would have immense credibility and would be well worth referencing in debate.

Curses for disobedience to God, according to the Prophecy of Moses (Deuteronomy 28)	Events befalling Job
Cursed in the city and cursed in the country (v16) Children, crops and livestock will be cursed (v18)	Job’s flocks are killed in the country (1:16-17) Job’s children are killed in the city (1:18)
Food supply would be cursed (v17)	Job wastes away to skin and bone (19:20)
Cursed going out and cursed coming in (v19)	Job is jeered in the marketplace and shunned at home (19:13-19)

Table 5_2: Comparison between the prophecy of Moses and the contemporary circumstances of Job.

5.1.2 Why the Prophecy of Moses is not the Doctrine of Retribution

There are essentially two errors with interpreting Moses’ prophecy as the doctrine of exact retribution.

1 The first is the timescale. Ultimately, every man who is not under the umbrella of God’s grace will receive retribution for his actions. In the fullness of time the evil man will not prosper, as he may in some cases currently appear to do. But this retribution is effected on Judgment Day and not necessarily

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beforehand. This truth is revealed in a variety of scriptures, such as Psalm 73, where the Psalmist Asaph, wearied so badly by the prosperity of the wicked as to contemplate abandoning his discipleship, finally comes to the realization that at a Time God has decreed it will be shown, and experienced, that the wicked man has no future.

“Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.
They are free from the burdens common to man;
they are not plagued by human ills.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence...
When I tried to understand all this,
it was oppressive to me
till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.
Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!”
(Psalm 73:1-6,16-19)

2 The second error concerns the demographic scale. The prophecy of Deuteronomy 28 is given to the nation as a whole. And on the scale of a nation the prophecy is relevant, as the Bible shows. When Israel, as a nation, turned away from God, they were punished just as Moses’ prophecy specified. When they repented and cried out, they were blessed as the prophecy

specified. The book of Judges gives extensive testimony to this truth. We can see at least seven complete cycles of oppression and deliverance for Israel in the time of the Judges, over 300 years, in direct realization of Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy 28. But there is nothing in Moses' prophecy that suggests it is supposed to be interpreted on the scale of a single man. That is what the friends of Job, and arguably Job himself, have misunderstood.

The three friends think they have seen the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy of blessing and cursing in the life of Job. But they have mistaken both the temporal and demographic scale of the prophecy and have therefore stumbled into interpreting Moses' words as the false doctrine of retribution. Quite possibly this is why God employs His excellent disciple Job to be a living and powerful force in exposing this folly at this time, when the prophecy of Moses might otherwise have caused His disciples to err in adopting it even more broadly than they evidently did (e.g. we see evidence of its existence described in John 9).

5.2 The Debate Proper

It's difficult to know at what scale we should approach the speeches of the three friends, and the replies from Job, in order to get a precise, yet manageable, appreciation of the debate. We don't want to be glib and cover the debate with a few sentences, especially since it forms the core of the book's volume! But neither do we want to start a clause by clause analysis, because we might easily lose sight of the forest for the trees.

I divide the seven completed speeches and rebuttals into three levels of speeches discriminated by the differing tones which I perceive to dominate. There are no crystal clear watersheds between the proposed levels; to some extent the tones slide from one to the next. Some themes, such as interpretative arguments and the doctrine of retribution, appear

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throughout. In proposing these different levels, I hope to identify the tone that rises to prominence during that period of the debate, in order to represent the subtly advancing tide of attack on Job.

	Speaker	Dominant Tone of friends' speeches	Dominant Tone of Job's responses
1	Eliphaz speaks (1) (ch 4-5) Job replies (ch 6-7)	Level 1: Observations	Humility & despair
2	Bildad speaks (1) (ch 8) Job replies (ch 9-10)		
3	Zophar speaks (1) (ch 11) Job replies (ch 12-14)	Level 2: Interpretative criticisms	Self-justification
4	Eliphaz speaks (2) (ch 15) Job replies (ch 16-17)		
5	Bildad speaks (2) (ch 18) Job replies (ch 19)	Level 3: Condemnations	Anger & pride
6	Zophar speaks (2) (ch 20) Job replies (ch 21)		
7	Eliphaz speaks (3) (ch 22) Job replies (ch 23-24, 26-31)		

Table 5_3: The structure of the debate, identifying different levels according to the dominant tone of the speeches.

Table 5_3 presents the three levels of discourse, each characterized by a different principal tone of the friends' speeches with Job and, correspondingly, a different tone in Job's reciprocal response.¹²⁹ We will also see a form of verbal rugby being played by the three friends, where each man picks up an idea passed to him by the former speaker, briefly repeats the ground covered, and then advances into new prosecutorial territory with a new idea of his own (and which play is adorned by the occasional high tackle on Job!).

I will not be re-attributing speeches from one speaker to another, or changing the order of the speeches to suit my ideas. It is almost commonplace for expositors of Job to rearrange or reattribute the speeches, seemingly arbitrarily. For example, Balchin desires the speeches of Elihu to be placed directly subsequent to the conclusion of the friends' speeches; before Job's final addresses¹³⁰ and many other expositors perform similar reshuffles.^{131,132,133} In each case the transfer seems driven by the expositor's need for his chosen interpretation to run more smoothly. I have not encountered any persuasive evidence that any of the speeches belong with any other character as those to which they are attributed in the scripture.

Sargent comments articulately on this point:

¹²⁹ I believe it helps to read the debate at least one 'level' at one time, i.e. two or three speeches along with Job's interspersed replies, to best understand what's going on. Reading just one speech per day, and the reply the next, is too slow a sampling rate to easily deduce the genuine developments in the debate and the book might always remain obscure if approached that slowly.

¹³⁰ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswiol Books, Oswestry, UK, 55

¹³¹ E. J. Kissane, "The Book of Job," 1939, Dublin, Eire, who reassigns chapters 25 & 26:5-14 to Zophar; and 26:1-4 & 27:7-23 to Bildad.

¹³² W. A. Irwin, "Job," in "Peake's Commentary on the Bible," Ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley, 1962, Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, UK, 391, reassigns chapter 27 to a variety of speakers including Zophar.

¹³³ S. Terrien, "The Book of Job: Introduction and Exegesis," in "The Interpreter's Bible," 1954, Vol. III, Abingdon, Nashville, TN, USA, 878-884, reassigns chapter 27:13-25 to Zophar.

“Though unlike Greek drama in every other respect, [the drama of Job] is like it in this, that it is coherent in its structure and unerring in movement to its end. This means that any play with exchanging rôles or with theories of interpolation is as harmful to real understanding in the one case as in the other. No part can be lost and no sequence can be disordered without damage to its whole perfection, or without grave injury to the chance of true understanding.”¹³⁴

5.2.1 Job’s Interruption of Bildad’s Third Speech

Table 5_3 also supplies us with another reason why Job interrupts Bildad’s third speech. The table shows all three friends have condemned Job already. Their communication has already sunk to the lowest level. The table shows Bildad was the first to condemn blameless Job (ch 18), then Zophar (ch 20) and finally the kindlier Eliphaz (ch 22). So it makes good sense that Job would interrupt any of the three speakers after this, since when one is condemned there is really nothing more to say, and indeed Job shows no further patience when Bildad begins to speak again, and cuts him off.

There is one more possibility why Job interrupts at this point; based more on the emotion of the situation than just frustration with the strained logic of somewhat circular arguments. We’re standing ringside to a situation which includes a man’s bereavement of all his ten children, combined with a level of physical suffering and social estrangement which perhaps supersedes any other man’s experience and which certainly stands in stark contradiction to any human notion of reward of blameless life. The friction between Job’s theology and experience has chafed him to the very bones to which his wasted frame has been reduced. It is in this context that Bildad the Shuhite pipes up and declares to Job’s face, *twice*, that it was right

¹³⁴ L. G. Sargent, “Ecclesiastes and Other Studies,” 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK, 134-135

and proper that all his children were killed (8:3-4 & 18:19-21). And we wonder why Job interrupted him when he tried to speak a third time? Perhaps we should simply marvel that Job persevered as long as he did with such a caustic companion.

There's always a possibility that we will miss these points, especially if we experience a comfortable life. Let's not over-analyze. We must remain mindful of the simple, even stark, emotional relief in which this drama is set, which is more than sufficient to explain why Job interrupts here. Bildad twice declared his satisfaction that all Job's children had been killed. No wonder Job didn't let him speak again!

5.2.2 Level 1: Speeches characterized by Observations: Eliphaz 1 & Bildad 1

Eliphaz the Temanite, the kindest of the friends, bases his opening speech on observations of Job's life. He sees Job as loving and charitable and Eliphaz draws from these observations to encourage Job that God will restore him.

“Think how you have instructed many,
how you have strengthened feeble hands.
Your words have supported those who stumbled;
you have strengthened faltering knees.
But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;
it strikes you, and you are dismayed.
Should not your piety be your confidence
and your blameless ways your hope?” (4:3-6)

In this Eliphaz unwittingly predicts the future, though it is the last time he speaks with such accuracy. Even then, this 'accuracy' is suspect. Eliphaz is under the impression that God *must* restore Job because Job is upright and blameless; extending directly from Eliphaz's belief in the doctrine of retribution. As we will see, God will restore Job because He loves him, and because

Job's work in suffering, (which work we will explore later) has been completed.

Bildad the Shuhite evidently takes his cue from Eliphaz and speaks similarly. However, even at this early stage, the first small step away from supporting Job is taken. Where Eliphaz speaks explicitly of Job's innocence, Bildad makes observations which imply, but don't state, that innocence.

“Surely God does not reject a blameless man
or strengthen the hands of evildoers.
He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
and your lips with shouts of joy.
Your enemies will be clothed in shame,
and the tents of the wicked will be no more.”
(8:20-22)

Eliphaz and Bildad's speeches are not correct in every regard, but they do support of Job. There is evidence of the false doctrine of exact retribution in even these early speeches, but they do not attack Job. Instead they use their false doctrine to offer him comfort for the future.

5.2.3 Job's Response to Level 1 Speeches: Humility & Despair

Job has not been put on the defensive by accusations against him, so he freely expresses his own sin and inadequacy before his Maker, albeit in the context of all men's failings. Job pleads for release against his suffering and shows he understands God both knows about, and controls, his condition.

“Why do you not pardon my offenses
and forgive my sins?
For I will soon lie down in the dust;
you will search for me, but I will be no more.”
(7:21)

“Indeed, I know that this is true.

But how can a mortal be righteous before God?”

(9:2)

In Job’s former statement it is possible to perceive some hint of belief in the doctrine of exact retribution because, like his friends, Job seems to intimate that his circumstances are an expression of God’s opinion of his sins. Indeed it may be that this is one effect the early speeches have had on Job, that they have begun to foist upon him the belief in the doctrine of exact retribution. A subtle result, but the actions of the Satan often are subtle. I don’t mean to suggest that the three friends have a conscious agenda to convince Job of the doctrine of exact retribution, or even that they have a conscious agenda to do Job any harm at all. To the contrary, the text strongly suggests they have every explicit intention to help Job. But Satan is the nature they bear, consciously or unconsciously; the elements of the heart of man which seek to promote self and resist God. The self-righteous and small-minded doctrine of exact retribution with which they have clouded their minds well characterizes the satanic nature of man. Why? Because the doctrine of retribution itself can be assembled from three components grounded and groomed in the human heart:

- Instant gratification: the need to see the end of a matter played out in a short timescale.
- Self-righteousness: the desire to pour scorn on those who are circumstantially afflicted; to appear better placed oneself.
- Pride: the need to be seen to both interpret visible events correctly and have the authority to impart moral rulings.

These are all common human failings: no wonder the doctrine of exact retribution is so common.

But Job’s belief in the doctrine of retribution is far from certain, he’s clearly wrestling internally with how to interpret his

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circumstances. He even offers statements which explicitly refute it and are, with some bitterness excused, accurate:

“It is all the same; that is why I say,
 ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’
When a scourge brings sudden death,
 he mocks the despair of the innocent.
When a land falls into the hands of the wicked,
 he blindfolds its judges.
If it is not he, then who is it?” (9:22-24)

This principle, of the obscurity of divine judgment, is one which his friends have not absorbed. This may count significantly towards the Almighty’s final analysis of who has spoken “that which was right” about Him.

Job finishes this series of exchanges with a heartfelt plea to God to end his suffering, in full recognition of God’s irresistible power and authority to do as He will.

“Are your days like those of a mortal
 or your years like those of a man,
that you must search out my faults
 and probe after my sin-
though you know that I am not guilty
 and that no one can rescue me from your hand?
Your hands shaped me and made me.
 Will you now turn and destroy me?
Remember that you molded me like clay.
 Will you now turn me to dust again?” (10:5-9)

For now at least, the plea does not appear to be granted, and Job’s pain continues. To exacerbate matters, the tone of the friends’ speeches subtly changes to a more aggressive form.

5.2.4 Level 2: Speeches characterized by Interpretations: Zophar 1 & Eliphaz 2

Zophar the Naamathite's first speech and Eliphaz's second, are characterized by the rising dominance of interpretative arguments. To illustrate the point: "You are wearing a red shirt" is simply an observation, but: "You are wearing a red shirt because you are a member of a gang," is interpretative: an explanation, even a motive, has been attributed to the observation. The presence of the word "because" is a signature indicator of interpretative argument. Clearly there is more potential for error with interpretative reasoning than with observations, simply because one is asserting the knowledge not only of *what* something is, but additionally *why* it is.

Zophar, the most reckless of the three friends, immediately names Job a mocker and a generator of idle talk (11:3), severely tarnishing any friendly or collaborative nature the discussions may have had. That done, Zophar proffers his opinion that Job's sufferings are a direct result of his sins and, furthermore, that an immediate cessation of those sins will realize, equally immediately, a cessation of his sufferings. It is the clearest declaration to date of the flawed doctrine of retribution.

“...if you put away the sin that is in your hand
and allow no evil to dwell in your tent,
then you will lift up your face without shame;
you will stand firm and without fear.
You will surely forget your trouble,
recalling it only as waters gone by.” (11:14-16)

Perhaps emboldened by his colleague's lack of restraint, Eliphaz abandons his erstwhile supportive testimony. Eliphaz takes the ball Zophar has passed and, taking the lead from Zophar's labeling of Job as a mocker and Job's words 'idle talk,' Eliphaz deems Job 'crafty' and his replies 'useless words' (15:3-5). Eliphaz then runs further with Zophar's argument, that salvation

can be achieved when Job's sins are abandoned, by turning his attention to the negative side of the same coin. He focuses on the detrimental retribution supposedly immediately received by the sinner whilst in the state of sin. He characterizes a hypothetical wicked man thus:

“Terrifying sounds fill his ears;
 when all seems well, marauders attack him.
He despairs of escaping the darkness;
 he is marked for the sword.
He wanders about—food for vultures;
 he knows the day of darkness is at hand.
Distress and anguish fill him with terror;
 they overwhelm him, like a king poised to attack,
because he shakes his fist at God
 and vaunts himself against the Almighty,
defiantly charging against him
 with a thick, strong shield.” (15:21-26)

Note the keyword ‘because,’ a signature indicator of interpretative argument. Eliphaz is saying not only that he knows *that* a man may be distressed but also *why* that distress is present.

Sadly, there seems an extra vignette of cruelty here. One of Eliphaz's chosen indicators of the distress of the man he assumes to be wicked is that marauders will attack unexpectedly. As Eliphaz well knows, this is precisely what has very recently befallen Job: i.e. an unexpected attack by both Sabeian and Chaldean raiding parties (1:15,17). The perfect match of circumstances between Eliphaz's hypothetical wicked man and Job's actual case is surely deliberate; and how tragically sad for Job to see his former friend round on him this way. The three would-be friends, perhaps unwittingly, are egging each other on to attack Job more and more severely, each speaker borrowing an idea or tactic from the previous speaker and enlarging upon it in an increasingly condemnatory way.

5.2.5 Job's Response to Level 2 Speeches: Self-justification

Job's integrity has been denounced and his blameless motives replaced by imputations of wickedness. Perhaps it is understandable, but now his replies are sarcastic, energized and self-justifying. It is at this point, for the first time, that he names himself righteous.

“Doubtless you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you!
But I have a mind as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know all these things?
I have become a laughingstock to my friends,
though I called upon God and he answered—
a mere laughingstock, though righteous and
blameless!” (12:2-4)

This is an unfortunate progression. Previously, Job has declared that he is blameless (9:21), as he reiterates here, but he has not before described himself as righteous. An inherent danger of the self-declaration of righteousness is that the human mind is then tempted to take a combative role against others, even God, buoyed by the confidence that person has in their perception of righteousness. Job's language now adopts the flavor of one preparing a court case, with the implication that God is his prosecutorial opponent – his Satan!

“Now that I have prepared my case,
I know I will be vindicated.
Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.
Only grant me these two things, O God,
and then I will not hide from you:
Withdraw your hand far from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.

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Then summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply.” (13:18-22)

As for Job’s opinion of his one-time friends, he adroitly dismisses their assistance.

“I have heard many things like these;
miserable comforters are you all!” (16:2)

But catastrophically Job does not eschew Satan, or distance himself from him. To the contrary, Job taunts him and invites further combat. We will return to this later, as one of the critical points where Job stumbled.

“But come on, all of you, try again!
I will not find a wise man among you.” (17:10)

Sadly in a manner similar to the Brer Rabbit story “The Tar Baby,”¹³⁵ this continued engagement is a poor choice for the hero of the tale. For Job, as for Brer Rabbit, continued re-engagement with the opponent leads to a sticky mess from which the protagonist is unable to extract himself.

The overriding feature of this session is that we have seen the Satan come to the fore. Overcoming the earlier sympathy the three friends had for Job, Satan explodes in the mindsets of the friends and causes them to harangue Job with aggression and self-righteousness.

And Satan is so very, very contagious.

5.2.6 Level 3: Speeches characterized by Condemnations: Bildad 2, Zophar 2 & Eliphaz 3

The Satan has riled Job, and Job wants to box. It doesn’t turn out well for anyone.

¹³⁵ J. C. Harris, “Br’er Rabbit and the Tar Baby,” 1881, in J. Torrence “The Importance of Pot Liquor,” 1994, August House, Little Rock, AR, USA

In the final level outright condemnation takes the reins. Bildad's second speech has a single thesis and employs a single mechanism. He thesis presents the lot of the wicked man and his mechanism is to observe every detail of Job's current condition and then, extrapolating backwards, claim that those details are exactly what would befall an evil man (Table 5_4).

	Calamity befalling Job	Calamity incumbent upon Bildad's hypothetical evil man (ch 18)
1	Job no longer knows peace and experiences only turmoil. (3:26)	Terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step. (v11)
2	Job is afflicted with a wasting skin disease. (2:7-8)	[Calamity] eats away parts of his skin; death's firstborn devours his limbs. (v13)
3	The 'fire of God' burned up Job's sheep and herdsmen. (1:16)	Fire resides in his tent; burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling. (v15)
4	Job's friends have forgotten him. (19:14)	The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land. (v17)
5	Job's children are killed. (1:18-19)	He has no offspring or descendants among his people, no survivor where once he lived. (v19)

Table 5_4: (L) Job's contemporary circumstances and (R) What Bildad speculates in his second speech will happen to a hypothetically evil man.

As is the pattern within the friends' speeches, Bildad is borrowing an idea that Eliphaz began in the speech before and enlarging upon it. Bildad has obviously chosen to have the circumstances of his hypothetically evil man match perfectly Job's current sorry state. Just in case Job could somehow miss the repeatedly implied condemnation, Bildad spells it out explicitly:

“Surely such is the dwelling of an evil man;
such is the place of one who knows not God.”
(18:21)

Zophar the Naamathite is still seething with injured pride, stung by Job’s sarcastic rebuke. He claims his depth of understanding drives his response (20:3). He raises the ante from Bildad’s condemnation and we can see the realization of the verbal rugby metaphor we postulated. Eliphaz in his second speech borrowed the name-calling from Zophar’s first speech and moved forward to new ground by postulating a wicked man with circumstances identical to Job. Bildad then borrowed that exact notion from Eliphaz to form the sole hypothesis of his second speech. So Zophar, once again with the prosecutorial baton, repeats the same idea of describing a hypothetical evildoer with Job’s exact circumstances, now for the third time (exchanging the term ‘evil man’ which Bildad used, for the more aggressive terms ‘wicked’ and ‘godless,’ which Eliphaz had initially introduced) before advancing into new territory of describing specific crimes which this wicked man is alleged to have performed. Zophar says:

“Surely you know how it has been from of old,
ever since man was placed on the earth,
that the mirth of the wicked is brief,
the joy of the godless lasts but a moment.
...total darkness lies in wait for his treasures.
A fire unfanned will consume him” (20:4-5,26)

“For he has oppressed the poor and left them destitute;
he has seized houses he did not build.
Surely he will have no respite from his craving;
he cannot save himself by his treasure.
Nothing is left for him to devour;
his prosperity will not endure.

In the midst of his plenty, distress will overtake him;
the full force of misery will come upon him.”
(20:19-22)

Finally, Eliphaz speaks for the third time. He takes the ball Zophar ran with: the accusation of oppressing the poor and leaving them destitute. But where Zophar left the alleged perpetrator unnamed and hypothetical, Eliphaz advances in attack and crosses a new line, in some ways the final line, and specifically names Job as the guilty man.

“Is not your wickedness great?
Are not your sins endless?
You demanded security from your brothers for no
reason;
you stripped men of their clothing, leaving them
naked.
You gave no water to the weary
and you withheld food from the hungry,
though you were a powerful man, owning land—
an honored man, living on it.
And you sent widows away empty-handed
and broke the strength of the fatherless.
That is why snares are all around you,
why sudden peril terrifies you,
why it is so dark you cannot see,
and why a flood of water covers you.” (22:5-11)

He caps the accusation with a final flourish of the doctrine of retribution, naming the alleged sins as the cause of Job’s suffering; even though, in voicing these accusations, he is flatly contradicting his earlier testimony! (4:3-4)¹³⁶

¹³⁶ This glaring contradiction is further evidence for the timescale of the speeches being several weeks, since Eliphaz would likely notice his egregious self-contradiction in a significantly shorter timeframe.

5.2.7 Job's Response to Level 3 Speeches:

Anger and Pride

The aggression level has certainly risen. Where Job was driven to self-justification before, now the outright condemnation provokes an even more negative mindset, which Gutierrez noted was largely provoked: "Job's rebellious attitude is due not so much to his sufferings as to the arguments that his friends develop in their pompous manner."¹³⁷

We might suppose Job's knowledge that the accusations were false might provide him some internal solace, even if he is angry with the accuser. Yet I suggest Job's innocence is a *disadvantage* to him maintaining a spiritually healthy attitude; for pride is even more dangerous than anger. When one is well aware one is innocent of all charges leveled it proves harder to keep a prideful counterattack in check. Job would be aware that anything he said in denying the accusations against him was necessarily true. Such power is dangerous.

We see straight away that Job is understandably angry at his friends for their fruitless vituperations:

“So how can you console me with your nonsense?
Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood!”
(21:34)

Job stops short of condemning his friends, despite the fact they have roundly condemned him. But he utters stern warning to them.

“If you say, ‘How we will hound him,
since the root of the trouble lies in him,’
you should fear the sword yourselves;
for wrath will bring punishment by the sword,

¹³⁷ G. Gutierrez, “On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 56

and then you will know that there is judgment.”
(19:28-29)

Why do I consider Job’s comments a warning, not outright condemnation, when he threatens them with the sword of judgment? Is it because I have pre-selected him as ‘the good guy’ and assessed his comments with more generosity than those of the friends? No, it is because Job uses the conditional tense, saying that *if* their intent truly was to hound him *then* his knowledge of his innocence likely spells trouble for them. This seemingly small distinction is important.

More importantly, and sadly, Job has veered away from speaking well of God; he is now drawn to speak well of himself. Job has been roused to anger, no doubt, though it would be a harsh exegesis that would accuse him of any sin at this point.

But worse is to come.

5.3 Job’s Final Speeches

Once Job interrupts Bildad and terminates the debate he speaks at length. I am assuming there are two discrete speeches: the first from chapters 26-28 and the second in chapters 29-31; simply because of the phrase at the beginning of chapter 29: “Job continued his discourse,” which suggests a division. His two speeches are a hybrid of continuing replies to his friends’ brutal castigations and announcements to the universe at large: a curious mix of ingenious insight, heartrending testimony and the poisonous interference of contagious Satan. We must appreciate that the Satan is best defined as the *spirit of the friends, pride*, more than the friends per se, because it limits the finger-pointing. Any one of us can be Satan at any time – and frequently we are! It also enables our understanding that Satan spreads as a virus. Too long in his presence, and anyone of us can be infected, even blameless

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Job. It takes more than a righteous man to resist Satan in the Wilderness, as we shall ultimately see.

On the central theme of the book – speaking about God – Job does not speak wrongly about who God is. He does not, as the three friends, assume he can predict what God can do or why God has acted the way He appears to have done. Job expresses his immense displeasure with his circumstances. But his discourse always allows God to be supreme, in a way that the Satan, right from the start, does not. Job says:

“God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells,
for he views the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.
When he established the force of the wind
and measured out the waters,
when he made a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderstorm,
then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he confirmed it and tested it.
And he said to man,
‘The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom,
‘and to shun evil is understanding.’” (28:23-28)

Chapter 29, the beginning of the following speech, is a chapter of great poignancy, in which Job reflects on the great pleasures he enjoyed in what seems now to be a former life. As with his plea for restoration (19:25-27) we can be encouraged by Job’s incredibly God-centered life. The central tenet of his former happiness is the proximity he felt with God; above even the pleasure of his children’s company, or the honor he was afforded in the city’s social and governmental structure.

“How I long for the months gone by,
for the days when God watched over me,
when his lamp shone upon my head

and by his light I walked through darkness!
Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,
when God's intimate friendship blessed my
house,
when the Almighty was still with me
and my children were around me,
when my path was drenched with cream
and the rock poured out for me streams of olive
oil." (29:2-6)

Thereafter Job's thoughts turn to the negative again, as he considers the dire consequences his afflictions have had on him in a society thoroughly imbued with the doctrine of retribution. Exacerbating his pain is the knowledge that he has helped others in the time of their distress, yet now he is in need, reciprocal charity is nowhere to be found.

"Surely no one lays a hand on a broken man
when he cries for help in his distress.
Have I not wept for those in trouble?
Has not my soul grieved for the poor?
Yet when I hoped for good, evil came;
when I looked for light, then came darkness."
(30:24-26)

I'm intrigued by the contrasts in Job's words. Every time he considers God, his spirits rise; every time he considers man, they fall. Job speaks well of God (ch 28) and remembers fondly the time when he felt God's blessings (ch 29). Yet as his thoughts turn to the world of men (ch 30) they darken appreciably. His mistreatment at the hands of the Satan provokes him to embitterment and, by remembering his own good deeds, his own satanic force of pride is finally unleashed. The prideful comments of his own justification, to which the friends provoked him (ch 27), are now revisited and augmented (ch 31).

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Thus we see the Satanic beast of human pride rearing its ugly head in Job's speeches. Job is right to rebut his friends' slanderous insults. But where this could provoke him to speak of God's inscrutability and faith in His inherent goodness, which he initially does in his ode to wisdom, Job cannot resist proudly forming his conclusion around his own integrity, not God's.

“As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice,
the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness
of soul,
as long as I have life within me,
the breath of God in my nostrils,
my lips will not speak wickedness,
and my tongue will utter no deceit.
I will never admit you are in the right;
till I die, I will not deny my integrity.
I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it;
my conscience will not reproach me as long as I
live.” (27:2-6)

This spirit burgeons in Job until he challenges God – never a wise move – to account for Himself, while he is now so confident in his own righteousness he feels enabled to stride into God's presence with all the self-assurance of royalty.

“Oh, that I had someone to hear me!
I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me;
let my accuser put his indictment in writing.
Surely I would wear it on my shoulder,
I would put it on like a crown.
I would give him an account of my every step;
like a prince I would approach him.” (31:35-37)

Satan's work is done. Job has named God a false accuser (Greek: 'diabolos' – translated in many scriptural occurrences as

‘devil’!) Though his friends doubtless never intended to hinder Job’s relationship with God, their prideful arrogance has so incensed Job that he has, tragically, become infected by it. Job parades his presumed innocence before God and man and, ironically by that very mechanism, is innocent no longer.

We should not be harsh with Job. It is only because he is convinced that his God is just and loving that he rages against the heavens. If Job had believed God were malicious or indifferent, he could have no disappointed anger, because all that happened would make sense. Nevertheless, Satan has fought with the righteous man. And Satan has won. Let me be clear: the three friends have not won the debate – they have lost, since Job has exposed their arguments as folly. But the Satan, *the pride the three friends exhibited*, (which pride had possessed the three friends before the debate even began), has now defeated Job. When Satan struggles with a righteous man, Satan wins. This is not, perhaps, the result we may have anticipated or hoped for, but it is a result from which we must certainly learn.

5.4 Reflection

The debate has proven fascinating. This isn’t just four humans taking up valuable scriptural space calling each other names. By the divine Hand, this is a dramatic presentation of a pure distillation of righteousness pitted against a distillation of human opposition to God. The righteous man versus the Satan at its most basic level! No wonder that Job is termed one of the ‘Wisdom Books’ in the scriptures; for what an immensely valuable text for the education of any who would be a disciple. Our need is to see the simplest, most fundamental version of righteousness combating unrighteousness, for that is what will be taking place in our lives every day; principally inside our own heads! Through the window of the book of Job we have access to the wisdom of seeing this battle played out move by move, like a

divine chess game, in all the complexity that the humanized form of that battle necessarily adopts. And how sobering to see that Satan wins! McGee also notices Job's Pyrrhic victory: "To all intents and purposes, Job has won the debate. But he hasn't won."¹³⁸

Yet the friends of Job began by sitting in silence for seven days alongside him. This was a valuable act of friendship: a submissive and cooperative act. It is submissive in that it does not attempt to explain answers to the sufferer of why he finds himself in that condition (which good deed they tragically proceed to confound). It is cooperative in that they participate in Job's suffering as much as they are able, their participatory presence doubtless a source of strength and comfort to Job upon the ashes pile. A Presbyterian minister eloquently commented:

"Presence is a service of vulnerability. To be present to others is to put oneself in the position of being vulnerable to what they are vulnerable to, and of being vulnerable to them. It means being willing to suffer what the other suffers, and to go with the sufferer in his or her own suffering. This is different from trying to become the sufferer. Presence does not involve taking another's place. That would be demeaning. It would suggest, 'I can take your suffering better than you can, so move aside; I will replace you.' Instead, presence involves exposing oneself to what the sufferer is exposed to, and being with the other in that vulnerability."¹³⁹

The practice of sitting alongside does not suggest any solutions for the sufferer, and this is probably wise. While the desire to assist a friend in pain is noble, suggesting solutions can

¹³⁸ J. V. McGee, "Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job," 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, 156

¹³⁹ C. Dykstra, "Vision and Character," 1981, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, USA, 102

result in projecting clumsy simplifications onto the scenario of suffering which cause more harm than good. We best recognize our place as the empathizer, the one who sits alongside in the ashes as Job's friends initially did.

The friends' vigil is exhortational. Ultimately intense suffering is not going to be salved by logical reasoning. Emotional and physical pain do not have roots in logical argument, so it is ironically illogical to attempt to remedy them *with* logical argument. I have noted even in preaching exercises how inadequate it is if all the preacher can do is demonstrate logical articulacy. A human connection needs to be made! And if that is true in a preaching scenario, how much more is it true in times of comfort! Active comradeship, the presence of a comforter alongside, is more powerful than all reasoned arguments, even intonations to count one's blessings. Beyond this we learn to trust in God, who can directly influence emotional wellbeing.

The Word of God himself promised:

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

(John 14:16-17, KJV)

Even this good deed of camaraderie, sadly, the three friends also promptly proceed to undo. Undoubtedly, the seven days of silence are the wisest things the friends ever said. From this point on, they sink into the folly of the doctrine of retribution, and their explanation of the God they believe they can define within its boundary walls.

Yet God is working with them, too. He brings these three mentally infected children into immediate proximity with Job, (just as the physically diseased were brought to the priest for

cleansing, e.g. Leviticus 14) and induces circumstances in which the effects can be played out, and God's truth ultimately revealed. I'm not suggesting that the principal explanation of why sufferings befall Job is to expose the falsehood of the doctrine of retribution. But it's entirely in keeping with God's character that He would work at many levels at once, including working the salvation of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar: the very hosts of the Satan themselves.

This provides great reason why the debate is included in the scriptural record. A good friend of mine beautifully articulated these thoughts in an email:

“But if the book is as much about the conversion of Job's friends as it is about the conversion of Job, then the time spent revealing their thinking makes sense. If the Satan mentioned at the beginning of the book is Job's jealous friends, then how wonderful God is revealed to be in this book. The pages I 'suffered' through [the lengthy debate] reveal God's patience with us in the foolishness of our own thinking. It shows a lot about God that he would be willing to work with these men to bring them to salvation; (literally that God is willing to work with Satan to save even him - just as He worked with Peter after he betrayed Jesus or Israel after they turned from God in the wilderness and after entering the Promised Land). And it shows how God can use the sufferings of a good man to help him to grow, while also saving the lives of others in the process. It seems to me, that if Satan is Job's friends, then God's grace is glorified through this book. Rather than being a depressing book about a good man who had to suffer a lot at the hands of an evil superpower, God allowed Job to be tempted for his own benefit, but also for the salvation of three adversarial men. So this would mean that the book of Job is trying to show us that just because we are in opposition to God, God doesn't

immediately write us off. He will work with us to bring us back to him. What an amazing picture of God that paints!”

Amen!

As always with the endeavor of the disciple, there are glimpses of brilliance amongst the failings. Job’s poem on wisdom in chapter 28 is a transforming insight into Job’s appreciation of the inaccessibility and supremacy of God’s wisdom. Some expositors even define this chapter as the very center-point of the drama,¹⁴⁰ but that is surely overstating the case, since this book contains two speeches from Almighty God! But Job’s ‘Ode to Wisdom,’ as it is commonly called, certainly contains a humbling and alluring picture of the obscurity of God’s wisdom.

“But where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell?
Man does not comprehend its worth;
it cannot be found in the land of the living.
The deep says, ‘It is not in me’;
the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’
It cannot be bought with the finest gold,
nor can its price be weighed in silver.” (28:12-15)

Job uses some of the language God Himself will use in His forthcoming revelations. This is a fine testament to Job’s insight; although Job will proceed to darken that fine counsel with the infections of his own pride. Above all, Job declares the wisdom of God inaccessible to man.

This is paramount. When we analyze God, or, as happens frequently, try to reason out whether He is working in various people’s lives as we feel He should be, we do nothing more than anthropomorphize God and then find fault within the limited

¹⁴⁰ L. Baeck, “Job and Kohelet,” 1957, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 54

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framework in which we've tried to describe Him. The fault invariably lies in the weakness of our analogous construction. That is to say, we make God into a man and then judge Him according to what seems right to us that human wisdom should proscribe as just or fair. For example, we conjecture questions such as these:

“What if a really wicked man, a serial rapist or murderer, recants on his death bed? Is God going to let him get away with that?”

“Did the jungle-bound tribes of Papua New Guinea, or Brazil, really have a chance to hear the gospel? Did God remember them as I have done?”

These questions and many like them I term ‘Micromanaging God.’ Peering over God’s shoulder to check He’s getting His sums right. An ironic thing to do, not only given the mind-numbing disparity of wisdom between ourselves and God, but also simply because most of us despise being micromanaged ourselves.

In “Tuesdays with Morrie,” a best-selling true story of an author who interviews his terminally ill professor, Morrie Schwartz, the professor’s suffering prompts the author to raise the subject of Job.

“Okay, question, I say to Morrie. His bony fingers hold his glasses across his chest, which rises and falls with each labored breath.

‘What’s the question?’ he says.

Remember the book of Job?

‘From the Bible?’

Right. Job is a good man, but God makes him suffer...

What [do] you think about that?

Morrie coughs violently. His hands quiver as he drops them by his side.

‘I think,’ he says, smiling, ‘God overdid it.’”¹⁴¹

In fairness to Prof Schwartz, he had no time to prepare a considered response and there is no evidence that he was a man well-versed in Biblical accounts, who might have given thought to the matter at a previous time. But the reflex comment: “God overdid it” is unfortunate, as it recapitulates the identical arrogance of the Satan in the prologue! The assertion is the same in both cases: “God *thought* He knew what He was doing, but actually I am more intelligent and so see the matter more clearly.”

By contrast Job’s poem on wisdom asserts categorically that whenever we audit God we are simply wasting our time – and potentially vexing the Almighty whom we are attempting to scrutinize! Job rightly expounds that God’s reasoning enters planes we cannot, which is why the projection of His will onto the dimensions we perceive is bound to be obscure at times. We try to view the intentions, strategies and operations of a limitless entity projected onto the tiny four-dimensional universe by which both ourselves and our hypotheses are tightly contained; so failure is inevitable. And was it really a fair accusation to bring in the first place? Is God really in need of our auditing, perchance we might find a fault in His accounting?

It is with a sympathetic sadness, therefore, that we witness Job collapse from this beautiful poem into his embittered entanglement with the Satan. I’m intrigued by observing that when Job was thinking about God, unfettered from the contributions of his friends’ insistence on who God was and how He was bound to behave, the poem on wisdom resulted. Yet once he was pulled back down to Earth to continue to wrestle with the Satan’s proud and hurtful attacks, he also collapsed into

¹⁴¹ M. Algom, “Tuesdays with Morrie,” 1997, Anchor Books, New York, NY, USA, 150-151

pride-filled rhetoric. Later we will be considering this in the context of the tactics Jesus employed to resist temptations.

However we cannot be critical of Job until we have at least attempted to understand the direness of his circumstances. He has been under sustained pressure from those he had previously thought to be his friends while wrestling to cope with the bereavement of all his ten children, the material losses of all his flocks and herds and his collapsed health and social estrangement. Job's world must be joyless indeed: he is in constant pain, married with the awareness that, by any realistic calculation, he is shortly about to die. An armchair philosopher might readily discount these factors as irrelevant to the main thrust of the debate; and if the account of Job is merely allegorical we can demand these matters be irrelevant to our hero. But this account details real life experiences of an actual man, so how carefully we must weigh them against his conduct in replying to his accusers!

Only once we have absorbed these thoughts are we truly qualified to reflect upon Job's final commentary where pride at last had grasped him. His closing comments, unfortunately, do not set this amazing disciple in the best light. But then, at our most pressurized moments, who amongst us would volunteer for the microscope on our conduct?

5.5 The Debate's Conclusion: The Subpoena

The cycles of the friends' speeches, and Job's replies, are not just a homogenous morass of the same commentary over and over, as they can appear at first glance. The tone of the friend's speeches progresses, the mood changes, as the debate develops. We still might get the impression that all the speeches and replies still seem a little bit circular, and therefore pointless. I think this remains true to a degree; and this conclusion has merit, because it

teaches the fundamental principle that a righteous man is advised to avoid spending round after round wrestling and wrangling with proud men. The Satan is not good company: especially for debate, as his habits are so infectious.

So where are we now? We've reached a vital point in the drama. Job has subpoenaed God (31:35). Job has not *solicited* God to speak with him, he has outright *demand*ed it. Interestingly, that's something Job earlier suggested would be a fruitless thing to attempt (9:16).

This has very important implications. If God were now to speak with Job, it would inadvertently propagate the falsehood that God is answerable to man; that the Creator's presence is required when demanded by His handiwork. So God does not speak at this point; and I speculate God *will not* speak while this dynamic remains, with Job having summoned the Almighty to his ashes pile. It is not that God *cannot* speak; that would be a foolish statement, nor is it God who needs the stalemate broken. Job has essentially cornered himself by setting up a situation where the one thing he truly desires, a proximate experience of his Maker, is now something he cannot receive. It is Job, therefore, who needs a way out of this mess, though he would not currently perceive it that way. Job needs someone to cancel the subpoena he has so unwisely issued, so that he will be able to hear from his God in a way that he understands has not come at his command.

Nor can this subpoena be cancelled by any of the three friends. The relationship between them and Job has decayed to the point where walls of pride have been erected such that neither will take instruction from the other. Thus someone else is now *vital*ly needed to release Job from his own trap.

Enter Elihu the Buzite, seemingly out of the blue; a newcomer to our drama. An entrance so timely, it was as if it were a gift from God...

To Speak Well of God

A voice of one calling:
“In the desert prepare the way for the
LORD; make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.”

Isaiah 40:3

Chapter 6

My Messenger Before Me

6.1 Is Elihu Good or Evil?

6.1.1 Weaknesses of the Theory

of Elihu being an Evil Man

6.1.2 Similarities between Elihu and the Three Friends

6.1.3 Differences between Elihu and the Three Friends

6.1.4 Evidence in Support of Elihu as the Herald of God

6.2 The Work of Elihu: Clearing the Subpoena

My Messenger Before Me

Elihu the Buzite is one of the most enigmatic characters in scripture. Several expositors have postulated that Elihu's character is a later addition to the book of Job.^{142,143,144} Evidence offered in support is that Elihu does not appear in the prologue and epilogue of the book, where the drama is established and concluded; and, logically, where we might anticipate all the players to be presented. But there is no substantive evidence, such as an older version of the book where Elihu the Buzite is not included. Gordis concedes that the supposed differences between Elihu's speech and those of the other characters (another postulated reason to mark Elihu as a later addition) are "fewer than is generally alleged," and even then does not detail what those few differences are alleged to be.¹⁴⁵ The reasons given to exclude Elihu from the tale frequently seem to be purely because the expositor cannot understand why he is there.

By contrast, we have reasoned that a newcomer is vital to release Job from the lonely corner he has backed himself into by subpoenaing God, and we shall see a second vital reason for the presence of Elihu in what follows. There is no doubt in my mind Elihu the Buzite is an essential and original character.

¹⁴² D. Atkinson, "The Message of Job," 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 121

¹⁴³ R. Gordis, "The Temptation of Job- Tradition versus Experience in Religion," 1955, in N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 82

¹⁴⁴ J. Royce, "Studies of Good and Evil: A series of Essays upon the Problems of Philosophy and of Life," 1898, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 157

¹⁴⁵ R. Gordis, *Ibid*

6.1 Is Elihu Good or Evil?

As for the moral character of Elihu, this is where the enigma peaks. He is arguably the most prominent character in the Bible about whom scriptural scholars cannot even agree whether he is good or evil!

The preponderance of verdict goes against him. Gutierrez takes a very negative view of Elihu, and attributes him the poorest of motives: “He is no friend of Job, and his words will therefore be cold and distant. His purpose, unlike the original purpose of Eliphaz and his companions, is not to comfort, but to teach and pass judgment.” From this verdict he goes on to label Elihu: “arrogant... conceited... pompous... impetuous... self-satisfied” within a few paragraphs of his analysis, although as a surprising caveat he does concede that Elihu’s analysis is more intelligent than that of the three friends.¹⁴⁶ Atkinson takes a similarly dim view of Elihu, denoting him: “full of his own importance... pompous... patronizing” and even disagrees with Gutierrez that Elihu adds any value to the discussion.¹⁴⁷ Balchin duplicates both views, stating Elihu is “no friend of Job” and “does not bring any fresh thought” to the discussion. He labels him “bumptious,” “guilty of... arrogance” and “a pompous lad,”¹⁴⁸ while the triumvirate of Gordis,¹⁴⁹ Dillard¹⁵⁰ and Weiss¹⁵¹ all add “brash” to the list of insults.

Some conclude Elihu is a good man. Ehrenberg expresses regret that analysts are inclined to see Elihu as “an interloper who indulges in textual criticism;” rather he perceives Elihu occupying

¹⁴⁶ G. Gutierrez, “On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 44-48

¹⁴⁷ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 122-123

¹⁴⁸ J. Balchin, “Sitting with Job,” 1998, Rhoswel Books, Oswestry, UK, 6, 54-58

¹⁴⁹ R. Gordis, *Ibid*

¹⁵⁰ R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, “An Introduction to the Old Testament,” 1994, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 204

¹⁵¹ P. Weiss, “God, Job and Evil,” 1948, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 184

the worthy station of: “the advocate of God.”¹⁵² Spongberg concludes similarly, seeing Elihu as a mediator between God and man.¹⁵³ McGee describes Elihu’s role explicitly: “Elihu is preparing the way for God to answer,”¹⁵⁴ a suggestion voiced two centuries earlier by Herder: “He prepares the way for the entrance of the divine Being,” albeit with the interesting caveat that Herder believes Elihu is not aware of his role.¹⁵⁵

I too see Elihu as a good man. I do not see him as a type of Christ, as some have suggested:^{156,157} I feel this is not the correct understanding of Christ’s role. Christ is the Word of God (John 1:14) and the Word of God will most certainly appear in the book of Job, in undiluted form! I submit we should understand Elihu the Buzite in the form of John the Baptist, the one who went before to prepare the way for the Word of God. A similar metaphor is to describe Elihu as God’s armor-bearer. His name has been asserted to mean: ‘God of him,’¹⁵⁸ or even ‘He is God,’¹⁵⁹ the latter translation supporting this notion strongly, as it portrays Elihu as being not one by himself, but entirely representative of another, as an armor-bearer was. McGee similarly describes Elihu as the one who advocates for God¹⁶⁰ for, although Elihu indicates the errors to which Job’s anger has driven him, he does not condemn him.

¹⁵² H. Ehrenberg, “Job the Existentialist,” 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 94

¹⁵³ E. M. Spongberg, “The Book of Job,” 1965, private publication, 104

¹⁵⁴ J. V. McGee, “Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job,” 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, 159

¹⁵⁵ J. G. Herder, “Vom Geiste,” 1783, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 146

¹⁵⁶ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*

¹⁵⁷ C. C. Walker, “Job,” 1935, Detroit Christadelphian Book Supply, Detroit, MI, USA, 21

¹⁵⁸ J. Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version,” in “Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance,” 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 13

¹⁵⁹ D. Baird, “The Education of Job,” 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 224; although I have been unable to ratify this asserted translation directly in a Hebrew text or concordance.

¹⁶⁰ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*, 157

A perpetual mystery is the absence of God's acknowledgement of Elihu. Balchin supposes that this is evidence that God has destroyed Elihu;¹⁶¹ but this is beyond what the text supports. Lovelock even proposes that God's rebuke: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (38:2) is aimed at Elihu, not Job.¹⁶² This is in error, however, since it overlooks the scriptural proof that Job himself clarified that the rebuke was aimed at him:

"You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely *I* spoke of things *I* did not understand, things too wonderful for *me* to know."
(42:3)

At first appraisal, to argue God's lack of response to Elihu as evidence for him being either good or evil is to argue, quite literally, from silence. That said, we will see an intriguing parallel with the work of John the Baptist as we continue our study of Elihu that suggests an explanation for his disappearance.

6.1.1 Weaknesses of the Theory of Elihu being an Evil Man

1 At the outset of Elihu's entry, all the negative analyses which accuse him as arrogant and pompous run into a significant problem: Elihu sat in silence throughout the debate.

Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused.

¹⁶¹ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 62

¹⁶² R. T. Lovelock, "Job," 1957, *The Christadelphian*, Birmingham, UK, 87

So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said:

“I am young in years,
and you are old;
that is why I was fearful,
not daring to tell you what I know.”

(32:4-6)

Is it the behavior of a pompous man to sit in silence, for weeks, while others speak? Does an arrogant man listen patiently while seven lengthy speeches and their rebuttals are presented to the assembly in which he sits? I find that highly unlikely! I recall the man who wryly observed that when the apocalyptic vision revealed silence in heaven for the space of half an hour (Revelation 8:1), that could only have occurred with the absence of certain saints he could name. McGee, who concludes Elihu is just another of the miserable comforters,¹⁶³ is compelled to concede his surprise: “He hasn’t opened his mouth so far, which is unusual for a young man.”¹⁶⁴ I’m sure we all know people for whom listening to this debate in silence would have been impossible. It simply defies belief Elihu could have maintained silence through what we have conjectured was weeks of formal debate, if he were suffering from the many deficiencies of boastfulness that are so readily attributed to him.

2 Elihu was angry with the three friends.

Those who purport that Elihu simply reworks or continues the three friends’ arguments have to explain what caused Elihu to be angry with them (32:3). If Elihu duplicates the arguments of the three friends, why would he be angry with what they have said?

¹⁶³ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*, vii

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 156

6.1.2 Similarities between Elihu and the Three Friends

I do not gloss over the potential weaknesses in interpreting Elihu as a good man. The fundamental concern is distinguishing him from the three friends. While I believe that the differences between Elihu and the three friends, listed in the next section, are sufficiently compelling to lend me peace of mind with my conclusion, there are apparent similarities of significance. Here is the evidence:

1 The apparent presence of the doctrine of exact retribution. Elihu says:

“[God] repays a man for what he has done;
he brings upon him what his conduct deserves.”
(34:11)

“If [men] obey and serve [God],
they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity
and their years in contentment.
But if they do not listen,
they will perish by the sword
and die without knowledge.” (36:11-12)

Elihu seems to apply the doctrine on the scale of one person and within one human lifetime, the two characteristic mistakes which the three friends also made.

However Job also offers commentary which looks suspiciously like the doctrine of retribution (ch 7), and we know that Job is accepted before God.

2 The apparent condemnation of Job.

“Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost
for answering like a wicked man!
To his sin he adds rebellion;

scornfully he claps his hands among us
and multiplies his words against God.” (34:36-37)

“Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to
affliction.” (36:21)

The latter comment, in fairness, is only a warning, very similar to the conditional warning that Job issued his friends (19:28-29). It is the former comment which generates most concern, although I do note some mitigation.

Elihu has not wickedly invented specific false accusations, such as Job oppressing widows and orphans, as the friends did. Nor has Elihu called Job a wicked man, rather he likens Job’s answer to the type of answer he would have anticipated from a wicked man. Before we dismiss this as hair-splitting, notice this is the same construct Job used when countering his wife’s suggestion to ‘curse God and die’:

[Job] replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman.”
(2:10)

No expositor castigates Job as condemnatory here, as if he called his wife a fool. Job said that she had answered in the same manner in which a foolish [the Hebrew implies ‘impious’] woman would have done, and the difference, which Spongberg also noticed,¹⁶⁵ is important. Elihu uses the same construct saying Job was “answering like a wicked man.”

That said, it is not trivial to dismiss or ignore the issues in this section, which is why Elihu the Buzite continues to puzzle any diligent expositor. I determine my conclusion from seeing the differences between Elihu and the three friends (below) to be considerably more compelling than the similarities. This is not an ideal conclusion, I would prefer to confidently rebut the similarities we appear to see between Elihu and the three friends

¹⁶⁵ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 14

independently of the differences, but I do not find the resources to do so. Perhaps it is helpful to consider that in a drama in which one major theme is to demonstrate the justification of God *alone*, we are unlikely to see any man presented without some degree of flaw.

6.1.3 Differences between Elihu and the Three Friends

In all, I offer ten reasons for seeing Elihu as fundamentally different from the three friends of Job, which subdivide into three categories:

- How Elihu speaks about the three friends
- How Elihu speaks about Job
- Most importantly, how Elihu speaks about God

In each of these categories he differs *starkly* from the three friends.

1 Throughout his speech Elihu proclaims God as the source of life, justice and wisdom. Elihu recognizes that any wisdom he possesses has come from God.

“But it is the spirit in a man,
the breath of the Almighty, that gives him
understanding.” (32:8)

“The Spirit of God has made me;
the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” (33:4)

“I get my knowledge from afar;
I will ascribe justice to my Maker.” (36:3)

In fact, when Elihu says: “one perfect in knowledge is with you,” (36:4) a quote which troubles many as seemingly the height of arrogance, I believe he is speaking of God, not himself, reassuring Job that God has not withdrawn from him, but is

present alongside him. This is the only interpretation consistent with the humble quotes above.

By contrast the three friends claim that they are the source of their own wisdom, through their own years of learning, and do not honor God with any recognition.

Eliphaz: “What do you know that we do not know?
 What insights do you have that we do not
have?
 The gray-haired and the aged are on our side,
 men even older than your father.”
(15:9-10)

Zophar: “I hear a rebuke that dishonors me,
 and my understanding inspires me to
 reply.” (20:3)

2 Elihu encourages Job to (continue to) praise God. I believe speaking well of God to be the central theme in the Joban tale, which places even more emphasis on Elihu’s worthy remark:

 “Praise God:
 Remember to extol his work,
 which men have praised in song.” (36:24)

In recommending this to Job, Elihu reminds Job of the things Job has spoken about God which were correct (e.g. ch 28) yet which, in Job’s later state of self-justification, no longer appear at the forefront of his comments.

By contrast there is silence from the three friends on recommendations to praise God, which silence speaks volumes, especially as it sets in sharp relief their insistence that Job should recognize their own intelligence and rectitude.

3 Elihu does not share the same mindset as the three accusers. Elihu is angry at the three friends for their condemnation of Job (32:3).¹⁶⁶

Indeed he explicitly rejects their arguments as worthless:

“But Job has not marshaled his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your arguments.”
(32:14)

4 In fact, Elihu’s emotions are the same as God’s. This we cannot overlook. Later in the drama we see God is angry with the three friends and displeased with Job for focusing on his own justification rather than God’s. Elihu voices the same views:

[Elihu] was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. (32:3)

“But you [Job] have said in my hearing—
I heard the very words-
‘I am pure and without sin;
I am clean and free from guilt.
Yet God has found fault with me;
he considers me his enemy.
He fastens my feet in shackles;
he keeps close watch on all my paths.’
But I tell you, in this you are not right
for God is greater than man.” (33:8-12)

By contrast the friends are angry with Job because Job refuses to accept *their* arguments as valid, not because Job justifies himself rather than God.

¹⁶⁶ In fact, many scholars agree that an earlier version of 32:3 read that the friends had condemned *God*, not Job. The alteration to the current reading is considered another of the Emendations of the Sopherim, discussed earlier.

5 Elihu confines his criticisms to Job's statements, not his former life; Baird observes this also.¹⁶⁷ Where Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar all commented on what Job had done in his past life, and invented sins to attribute to him, Elihu does not. He does not refer to any of Job's disastrous situations; implying he can't explain why they have happened. Elihu's criticisms are limited solely to the things Job has spoken which base his justification on his own righteousness, not God's.

6 Of critical importance in a counselor's role, Elihu makes clear that he does not see himself as fundamentally elevated above Job. The only elevation Elihu will permit is that of God above all men.

“I am just like you before God;
I too have been taken from clay.
No fear of me should alarm you,
nor should my hand be heavy upon you.” (33:6-7)

By contrast the three friends do not sit alongside Job to speak well of God, but rather create barriers and distances between themselves and Job in their constructions of speech.

Eliphaz: “We have examined this, and it is true.
So hear it and apply it to yourself.” (5:27)

Bildad: “When will you end these speeches?
Be sensible, and then we can talk.” (18:2)

The sense of camaraderie that Elihu takes care to construct is helpful in allowing his corrective comments, which are contrastingly blunt, to be heard by Job.

¹⁶⁷ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 227

To Speak Well of God

7 It may seem like a small point, but Elihu calls Job by name no fewer than ten times during his dialogue, both directly in the second person and indirectly in the third (32:12,14; 33:1,31; 34:5,7,35,36; 35:16; 37:14). By fascinating contrast, none of the three friends reference Job by name even once! Given the length of their speeches, that is surprising indeed.

I believe using someone's name while talking to them helps establish a sense of friendliness, camaraderie and respect. When I teach classes at religious gatherings, such as week-long Bible schools, I make a special effort to learn the names, and interests if possible, of everyone in the class; precisely for this reason. Often adult classes have attendances in the hundreds, which realistically precludes this, but the often separate teen classes can number ~40, so learning at least everyone's name is workable. Furthermore I find that teens are often slightly underestimated, arguably patronized, in any religious community, by being seen as those whose limited life experience precludes the possibility of their offering insightful comment on spiritual matters. While a lesser degree of life experience can imbalance *perspective* on a given issue, this does not compromise ability to contribute meaningfully towards spiritual arguments per se. In fact, to the contrary, the younger mind often displays a keener ability to think outside the boundaries of established thinking: an invaluable tool when trying to discriminate between the message from God's Word and culturally established beliefs.

Addressing someone personally in discussion is a step forward in establishing mutual respect and thereby trust. I believe this is the mark of respect which Elihu shows Job, and which the three friends pointedly do not.

8 Elihu *wants* Job to be vindicated, and explicitly says so.

“Pay attention, Job, and listen to me;
be silent, and I will speak.
If you have anything to say, answer me;

speak up, for I want you to be cleared.”
(33:31-32)

The friends don’t call for this at all! Rather they condemn Job outright and called for abandonment of sins he has not committed. They want themselves to be justified.

9 Elihu rightly reasoned that restoration comes at God’s discretion, not necessarily at the eschewing of sin.

 “Yet if there is an angel on his side
 as a mediator, one out of a thousand,
 to tell a man what is right for him,
to be gracious to him and say,
 ‘Spare him from going down to the pit;
 I have found a ransom for him’-
then his flesh is renewed like a child’s;
 it is restored as in the days of his youth.”
(33:23-25)

By contrast the three friends wrongly reason that Job’s salvation is essentially in his own hands, via the doctrine of exact retribution, where if he abandons the sins they assume to be present, God will be essentially compelled to restore his fortunes.

10 Elihu is not criticized by God.

At the end, God rebukes the three friends because they have not spoken of Him what is right. Yet there is no rebuke, nor even mention, of Elihu. This difference is of profound importance, because the single most important parameter in determining whether a man is good or evil is how God responds to him. The books of Kings and Chronicles illustrate this excellently. One can read of the deeds of two different kings, which seem to speak of almost indistinguishable lives. Yet the text pronounces, with the certainty only the Father can wield, that

one is a good king and the other is evil. Similarly the two replies Job gives to God's speeches (40:4-5 & 42:2-6) might seem very similar to the human observer, yet clearly the former is unacceptable to God, while the latter earns His approval. If nothing else, we learn to form our conclusions about a man primarily from what God says of him, if that information is available, and only secondarily from our own deductions from acquired evidence.

Applying this idea, therefore, we ask: If the arguments of Elihu are mere duplicates of the arguments of the three friends, and Elihu is as culpable as they, should he not be rebuked the same way? Is it even credible that God would serve three out of four identically culpable people the same judgment and frankly ignore the other? Surely not!

Yet one might counter: "But if Elihu were as innocent as Job, why is he not commended for speaking that which is right about God, as Job was?" Let's consider that immediately.

6.1.4 Evidence in Support of Elihu as the Herald of God

1 The timing of Elihu's entry is critical in understanding his role.

Job is a blameless man, beloved of God, and he has earnestly desired an audience with the Father. Regardless of what stumbles he may have made in contracting some of the pride of *Les Conforteurs Miserables*, he is a faithful disciple of the Lord, the Lord who has made this promise:

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.
(Malachi 3:1)

The Lord promises He will come when His company is urgently sought by those who serve Him. (The initial quote was given to the Israelites at the time of the prophet Malachi precisely because they did *not* truly seek the Lord at all, but merely performed ritual duties devoid of any true dedication of heart or mind, which is why the Lord was not active in their lives.) In the same prophecy, the Lord also reveals that He does not change (Malachi 3:6), which means His promise is true at all times. To this we add these facts:

- James teaches: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16, KJV)
- Job is one of the most righteous men who ever lived (Ezekiel 14:20).
- Job’s prayer is to hear from his God: the ‘Lord whom he is seeking,’ as Malachi phrases it.
- Job’s prayer is certainly fervent.

This scriptural evidence implies God *will* come to Job, albeit not because Job has demanded it, which is where Job has unfortunately positioned himself at the end of the debate, but *because God has promised it*. Further, God explains in the prophecy above that He will first send a messenger to prepare the way before Him.

For God to send a messenger before Him is logical. When God’s Son came into the world to present his ministry, God sent ‘Elijah’ to come before him, who was John the Baptist (Luke 7:27). John the Baptist took the role of correcting the deficiencies in the thinking and practices of the local populace, so they could be appropriately washed, even in baptism, to meet the One for whom they had waited so long. In fact when any important speaker is to address an audience, he or she generally has some form of introduction given by another person, to quiet the crowd, and set the stage, so to speak.

Therefore, if God’s Son is worthy of a messenger to go before him and introduce his ministry, how much more is God

Himself worthy? It would be extraordinary for God to present a speech *without* one preparing the way beforehand! This strongly suggests we should understand Elihu as the herald of God.

2 Elihu uses some of the same language God Himself will use in His speeches to Job. This is particularly powerful in establishing Elihu as occupying the role of the ‘messenger who goes before,’ because it mirrors the dynamic between John the Baptist and Jesus.

John the Baptist first proclaimed the message of repentance, (the same scripture also establishes him as occupying the role of the one sent to prepare). John said:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

(Matthew 3:2-3, quoting Isaiah 40:3)

When Jesus began his ministry he proclaimed:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 4:17)

John the Baptist and Jesus have used exactly the same phrase. Yet I believe it would be inaccurate to say Jesus is quoting John the Baptist, even though the words are identical and John has spoken them first. Jesus is the greater, John the lesser. I contend what we are seeing here is John *correctly anticipating* the message of Jesus, by reason of being a man closely attuned to the mission of the Christ. John is essentially quoting the Christ, before the Christ has spoken.

I submit we see the same dynamic here in the book of Job between Elihu and God. Elihu speaks first, as the one who goes before, describing the wondrous works of the Maker. God

speaks later on the identical subject matter, and some of the phrases are again the same. But it is not, of course, that Yahweh is quoting Elihu. Rather Elihu is correctly anticipating small fragments of the Almighty's speeches, because he is closely attuned to God's thinking.

Example 1: The thunderous voice of God.

Elihu: “God's voice thunders in marvelous ways;
 he does great things beyond our
 understanding. (37:5)

GOD: “Do you have an arm like God's,
 and can your voice thunder like his?”
(40:9)

Example 2: God's uncontrollable majesty is partly seen in His governance of the snow, rainclouds and lightning.

Elihu: He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth,'
 and to the rain shower, 'Be a mighty
 downpour.'
 ...Listen to this, Job;
 stop and consider God's wonders.
 Do you know how God controls the clouds
 and makes his lightning flash?”
(37:6,14-15)

GOD: “Have you entered the storehouses of the snow
 or seen the storehouses of the hail,
 which I reserve for times of trouble,
 for days of war and battle?
 ...Can you raise your voice to the clouds
 and cover yourself with a flood of water?
 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?”

Do they report to you, ‘Here we are?’
(38:22-23,34-35)

Example 3: Pride is the threat to man’s eternal salvation.

Elihu: “[God] may speak in their ears
 and terrify them with warnings,
to turn man from wrongdoing
 and keep him from pride,
to preserve his soul from the pit,
 his life from perishing by the sword.”
(33:16-18)

GOD: “Unleash the fury of your wrath,
 look at every proud man and bring him
low,
look at every proud man and humble him,
 crush the wicked where they stand.
Bury them all in the dust together;
 shroud their faces in the grave.
Then I myself will admit to you
 that your own right hand can save you.”
(40:11-14)

It is inconceivable to me that a wicked man could faithfully anticipate the very themes God Himself chooses to use! This point alone compels me to believe Elihu is indeed God’s messenger.

In fact, by understanding Elihu the Buzite as a type of John the Baptist, this discovery of seeing him use the same words God will use, essentially quoting God before God speaks, is understandable. It makes good sense because it matches a scriptural template with which we’re already familiar: the dynamic of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus.

3 Elihu is absent from the epilogue. While this detail may seem unhelpful in establishing anything, it is actually surprisingly useful in supporting the notion that Elihu occupies the role of John the Baptist. John himself explains why:

John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:27-30, NKJV)

John prophesies that it is the nature of the herald to diminish, to fade into the background and disappear, once his role is completed. This provides an explanation, perhaps the *only* reasonable explanation, why Elihu the Buzite enigmatically fades away from the drama, seemingly without proper closure to his character or conduct. We have already reasoned that the fact he is not rebuked along with the three friends is evidence that he is not culpable of wrongdoing, as they are. And with his role now understood as the herald who is to diminish, so that the One he introduces is appropriately augmented, it makes good sense that he is not celebrated as is righteous Job, even though he has spoken appropriately of God in his speeches.

Nor should we think Elihu is unjustly under-served. As we have said, it is a central tenet of the drama of Job to challenge the reader on the whole concept of what qualifies as 'deserved.' Suffice to hear the words of the Master:

"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (Luke 17:10)

6.2 The Work of Elihu: Clearing the Subpoena

The role of the ‘one who went before’ is described by the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one calling:

“In the desert prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

(Isaiah 40:3-5)

So we should anticipate Elihu will operate in the same way John the Baptist did: refuting the contemporary false doctrines and practices and urging a road to repentance to meet with God. In short, Elihu the Buzite will ‘straighten the way.’

But we should not forget the dramatic setting in which Elihu’s speeches are couched. A storm is building, both physically and metaphorically. The metaphorical storm is compounded from the combined anger of the participants. Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite are all frustrated with Job; and Zophar has somehow contrived to feel insulted to boot. Job is angry too: angry at his worthless comforters for sure and frankly angry at God as well. Added to this comes Elihu the Buzite and, as we learn at the very outset, he too is angry – with everyone! This is a tense and stormy scene indeed.

As if to augment, even exacerbate, this stressful scenario, a physical storm is building. I presume this equates to a rising wind, a lowering sky, a darkening vista and perhaps already some staccato accentuations of lightning on the horizon. Indeed, Elihu may have been partly drawn to reference the meteorological elements by reason of their visible proximity. I do not mean to undermine my previous argument that Elihu the herald correctly anticipates small parts of God's speech. Rather I suggest God prepared the storm to graphically illustrate His oratory and Elihu, being sensitive to this excellent example of God's uncontrollable power, was therefore drawn to reference it.

In Elihu's 'straightening of the way' we find explicit corrections. First, Elihu corrects Job's angry conclusion that God does not listen to the cry of the afflicted.

Job: "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer;
 I stand up, but you merely look at me."
(30:20, also 31:35)

Elihu: "Why do you complain to him
 that he answers none of man's words?
For God does speak—now one way, now
another—
 though man may not perceive it.
In a dream, in a vision of the night,
 when deep sleep falls on men
 as they slumber in their beds,
he may speak in their ears
 and terrify them with warnings,
to turn man from wrongdoing
 and keep him from pride,
to preserve his soul from the pit,
 his life from perishing by the sword."
(33:13-18)

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Elihu describes the primary act of salvation as saving a man from his pride. Elihu identifies pride as the sole wrongdoing of man; the core of the spectrum of sin; the primary mechanism by which his life is threatened. We will return to this critical theme later and identify Elihu's remark as one of great perspicacity and relevance.

In a second example, Elihu straightens Job's implications that the Almighty is unjust and Job's error he is the example of righteousness.

Job: "As surely as God lives, who has denied me
 justice,
 the Almighty, who has made me taste
 bitterness of soul,
 as long as I have life within me,
 the breath of God in my nostrils,
 my lips will not speak wickedness,
 and my tongue will utter no deceit.
I will never admit you are in the right;
 till I die, I will not deny my integrity.
I will maintain my righteousness and never let go
of it;
 my conscience will not reproach me as
long as I live." (27:2-6, see also 32:1)

Elihu: But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family
 of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying
 himself rather than God...
 "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong,
 that the Almighty would pervert justice."
(32:2, 34:12)

The work of Elihu is completed. The subpoena Job issued, that God *must* answer him because Job's notion of justice requires it, has been vacated. Atkinson comments similarly on the

effect of Elihu: “The Elihu speeches, which came after Job’s last stand, prevent us from thinking that God is somehow forced into a reply by Job’s persistence in his previous speech.”¹⁶⁸ I wholeheartedly agree, yet this is a surprising conclusion for Atkinson to make, since he previously concluded the Elihu speeches were an addition to the original text, but now finds good reason for them to be there.

Most important, however, is the *effect* of the vacated subpoena. Elihu has spoken for God and enabled Job to perceive that God does not owe him an answer. Job has been released from his own trap and he is free once more to receive communication from the Almighty.

Thus we are ready to move into the final act of the drama. During Elihu’s speech the storm has been building. It is about to climax. As the lightning cracks, detonating in thunderous explosions the very air through which it passes; as the rain lashes; as the wind howls; the culmination of the debate, indeed many debates, is about to be heard. In the centre of the storm, the Final Speaker is preparing. As the storm breaks upon them, He speaks.

¹⁶⁸ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 138

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“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Psalm 46:10

Chapter 7

GOD Speaks

- 7.1 God's First Speech: Controlling the World**
 - 7.1.1 Observations and Interpretations
from God's First Speech
 - 7.1.2 Names of God in the Book of Job

- 7.2 Interlude: Job's Unsatisfactory Answer**
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- 7.4 God Answers Job**
 - 7.4.1 Job Understands God's Answer
 - 7.4.2 If Behemoth is Leviathan, Why the Repeat?
 - 7.4.3 Behemoth and Leviathan: a Progressive Beast

- 7.5 Reflection**

GOD Speaks

7.1 God's First Speech: Controlling the World

- 2 “Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?
3 Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.
4 Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6 On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone-
7 while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?
8 Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
9 when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
10 when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
11 when I said, “This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt?”
12 Have you ever given orders to the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,
13 that it might take the earth by the edges
and shake the wicked out of it?
14 The earth takes shape like clay under a seal;
its features stand out like those of a garment.
15 The wicked are denied their light,
and their upraised arm is broken.

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- 16 Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
- 17 Have the gates of death been shown to you?
Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death?
- 18 Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the
earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.
- 19 What is the way to the abode of light?
And where does darkness reside?
- 20 Can you take them to their places?
Do you know the paths to their dwellings?
- 21 Surely you know, for you were already born!
You have lived so many years!
- 22 Have you entered the storehouses of the snow
or seen the storehouses of the hail,
23 which I reserve for times of trouble,
for days of war and battle?
- 24 What is the way to the place where the lightning is
dispersed,
or the place where the east winds are scattered
over the earth?
- 25 Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a path for the thunderstorm,
26 to water a land where no man lives,
a desert with no one in it,
27 to satisfy a desolate wasteland
and make it sprout with grass?
- 28 Does the rain have a father?
Who fathers the drops of dew?
- 29 From whose womb comes the ice?
Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens
30 when the waters become hard as stone,
when the surface of the deep is frozen?
- 31 Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades?
Can you loose the cords of Orion?

- 32 Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?
- 33 Do you know the laws of the heavens?
Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?
- 34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and cover yourself with a flood of water?
- 35 Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?
Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?
- 36 Who endowed the heart with wisdom
or gave understanding to the mind?
- 37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens
- 38 when the dust becomes hard
and the clods of earth stick together?
- 39 Do you hunt the prey for the lioness
and satisfy the hunger of the lions
- 40 when they crouch in their dens
or lie in wait in a thicket?
- 41 Who provides food for the raven
when its young cry out to God
and wander about for lack of food?
- 1 Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?
Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn?
- 2 Do you count the months till they bear?
Do you know the time they give birth?
- 3 They crouch down and bring forth their young;
their labor pains are ended.
- 4 Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds;
they leave and do not return.
- 5 Who let the wild donkey go free?
Who untied his ropes?
- 6 I gave him the wasteland as his home,
the salt flats as his habitat.
- 7 He laughs at the commotion in the town;
he does not hear a driver's shout.

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- 8 He ranges the hills for his pasture
and searches for any green thing.
- 9 Will the wild ox consent to serve you?
Will he stay by your manger at night?
- 10 Can you hold him to the furrow with a harness?
Will he till the valleys behind you?
- 11 Will you rely on him for his great strength?
Will you leave your heavy work to him?
- 12 Can you trust him to bring in your grain
and gather it to your threshing floor?
- 13 The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully,
but they cannot compare with the pinions and
feathers of the stork.
- 14 She lays her eggs on the ground
and lets them warm in the sand,
15 unmindful that a foot may crush them,
that some wild animal may trample them.
- 16 She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers;
she cares not that her labor was in vain,
17 for God did not endow her with wisdom
or give her a share of good sense.
- 18 Yet when she spreads her feathers to run,
she laughs at horse and rider.
- 19 Do you give the horse his strength
or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?
- 20 Do you make him leap like a locust,
striking terror with his proud snorting?
- 21 He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength,
and charges into the fray.
- 22 He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;
he does not shy away from the sword.
- 23 The quiver rattles against his side,
along with the flashing spear and lance.
- 24 In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;
he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.

- 25 At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, ‘Aha!’
He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.
- 26 Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom
and spread his wings toward the south?
- 27 Does the eagle soar at your command
and build his nest on high?
- 28 He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night;
a rocky crag is his stronghold.
- 29 From there he seeks out his food;
his eyes detect it from afar.
- 30 His young ones feast on blood,
and where the slain are, there is he.”
- (38:2-39:30; verse numbers included)

God has spoken! But how shall we *hear* this speech? What is He telling us?

It’s important to be honest. This speech always used to seem incredibly unsatisfactory to me; although that was not a problem for my faith. I was confidently prepared to trust that God is loving and compassionate and attending Job’s needs as He attends all things, because my faith had been firmly established by other means. But I wasn’t capable of understanding how this speech was consistent with that. This speech looked like boasting! God seemed to be saying: “Look at all the things I can do! Can you do them? No, you can’t.” That didn’t appear to be very compassionate or constructive. And how was that supposed to answer Job’s question of why he was suffering? Ultimately, it was the subject of *justice* that Job was broaching, but God seemed to be replying on the subject of *power*. Were we to relate the two? Was God trying to teach that ‘Might is Right’? Surely not!

So what’s going on?

First we need to challenge ourselves why we are pursuing an answer. Do we seek an answer to Job’s suffering because it’s

inherently reasonable for us to receive one, or simply because that's what inquisitive humans do? If we really have 'seen God' at work in our lives, as Job claims he did, is it appropriate to conclude that that is not enough? Can we still sidle up to the Heavenly Throne in our workhouse rags and say: "Please, sir, I want some more,"¹⁶⁹ without necessarily insulting our Maker?

I suggest we can.

If we look to expositors of God's speeches throughout the extensive breadth of literature, we find very little helpful. The vast majority have thrown in the towel completely and concluded that God never does answer Job.^{170,171,172,173,174} Atkinson typifies with: "God gives no answer to Job's questions,"¹⁷⁵ and Susman likewise openly states God does not give Job "any kind of intelligible answer" but merely poses him a counter-question.¹⁷⁶ Ragaz honorably tries to justify what he sees as God's failure to answer Job by stating that God *is* the answer, rather than having to be the source of an answer¹⁷⁷ which, while not wholly without merit, does have the flavor of an excuse. Glatzer takes a more negative view and claims Job has essentially been beaten down to a position of "resigned acceptance" from God's speeches as God addresses none of his concerns and He "remains distant" from

¹⁶⁹ C. Dickens, "The Adventures of Oliver Twist," 1838, Book of the Month Club reprint 1997, New York, NY, USA, 15

¹⁷⁰ R. Gordis, "The Temptation of Job- Tradition versus Experience in Religion," 1955, in N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 85

¹⁷¹ J. Daniélou, "Holy Pagans of the Old Testament," 1957, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 106

¹⁷² H. H. Rowley, "From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament," 1963, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 123

¹⁷³ W. O. E. Oesterley & T. H. Robinson, "An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament," 1934, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 216

¹⁷⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament," 1913, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 246

¹⁷⁵ D. Atkinson, "The Message of Job," 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 138

¹⁷⁶ M. Susman, "The Jewish Frontier," 1956, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 90

¹⁷⁷ L. Ragaz, "The Bible: An Interpretation," 1950, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 130

man,¹⁷⁸ while Murray goes further, condemning the response of God as: “On moral grounds... pretty miserable.”¹⁷⁹

I have no hesitation in distancing myself from these interpretations. God answers. The question is: did we listen closely enough to hear what He said?

Ultimately, I hope to share an explanation of God’s speeches which baffled me for years, which is relevant to Job’s cries and, more importantly, commensurate with the broader scriptural presentation of a *Loving* Father, not merely a Supreme One. This is the principal motivation for this book: to break ground in presenting the work of the Father with Job and his three friends as evidence for His loving nature, not merely His lofty omnipotence. In this way I hope to speak well of God, in keeping with the central theme of the book. I hope to show that God’s comments are in fact *on topic*, addressing the exact concerns Job has raised, yet also broaching overriding themes which Job has missed. That said, I don’t want to dismiss, or try to hide, that the subject matter of the first speech appears to be very odd. We are essentially given a guided tour of the physical creation, and that does seem more than a little strange, given Job’s explicit call for justice.

7.1.1 Observations and Interpretations from God’s First Speech

By the end of these observations, we still won’t have a finished explanation of what the speech means: this will only be unlocked by adding the components from God’s second speech. But these observations are important in working towards what that answer will be. They will also identify intermediate, independent sources of comfort and support which highlight the

¹⁷⁸ N. N. Glatzer, “The Dimensions of Job,” 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 8

¹⁷⁹ G. Murray, “Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy,” 1960, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 196

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richness of God's answer amid the tensions that exist on the ground.

1 First, I notice God's style. God does not engage in debate, rather He makes pronouncements and revelations. It is also interesting that He addresses Job with some sarcasm; yet clearly Job is highly favored by God to receive such lengthy discourse. In both cases, this underscores the pure supremacy of the Maker. Many expositors see nothing more than the subject of supremacy in the speeches of God and I believe there is much more. But this is the appropriate *framework* in which God's answers are couched: His inviolable, unapproachable, supremacy above His work. The entire creation we enjoy is a free gift and our own existence is nothing more than a constant interaction within it. We did not earn the privilege of feeling the texture of the newly fallen snow as it crunches squeakily beneath our boots. Nor did we work to produce the crimson vista of sunset playing across the gently curved ripples of the lake. The booming of the ocean pounding watery fists against craggy cliffs was not contracted by our efforts, any more than was the chirruping cacophony of cicadas on a languid Caribbean evening. It was not our investment that produced the intoxicating smell of a campfire on a foggy autumn day, as grey smoke, accented with bright orange sparks, coils gently skywards and friends huddle around the fire for warmth and companionship. Myriad blessings attend us daily and from this alone it is clear God cares for His creation and that, as Creator, He is not answerable to any part of it. This teaches us that God does not owe us anything, *not* because we are inferior to Him (although we are), but because we're already massively overpaid.

2 Extending from this point, the 'tour of creation' on which the divine speech leads us helps negate our anthropocentric view: the view that everything in the Universe must have meaning *to us* before its existence is justified. God corrects this breathtaking

arrogance, perhaps most directly when He reveals that He waters the flowers in the desert places that bloom where His Eyes are the only ones that see them (38:25-27). The ostrich (39:13-18), so foolish she destroys the young in her own nest, can be offensive to us, since we are mortal creatures fixated with mortal survival. But she is part of God's creation and no part is complete by itself. She lacks sense, but God takes pleasure in her anyway for the role she plays as one element in the intricate ecosystems He formed. In fact the age old riddle: 'If a tree falls in the forest when there's no-one (i.e. no *human*) to hear it, does it make a sound?' is now exposed as nothing more than an extension of this same anthropocentric arrogance. Imagine another species postulating the same question. Imagine a squirrel says to his friend: "What if a tree fell in the forest, and there were only birds, insects and a few pointless humans standing around to hear it. Would it make a sound, do you think?" The question becomes easier to answer when viewed this way.

God references the astronomical bodies, meteorological elements and physical beasts, to underscore that we are a small part of something far larger, far greater than we imagine, that operates together to form the beauty with which God intends to abide. It's not all about us. Creation performs its various functions to glorify (and thereby speak well of?) the One who made them. We have a place, and that place is not issuing subpoenas to the Almighty in demand of more provisions that satisfy our preconceived notions of justice and desert. Ultimately, even this revelation of God's truth is for our benefit, for while any disciple is cursed with the prideful misconception that the universe is anthropocentric, he will never be able to draw close to his God or find true harmony in the world in which he has been placed.

3 There are progressions in the speech too. The earlier verses reveal God as Creator (38:1-21), the latter present Him as caregiver. God is first shown as the Master Builder: laying the

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Universe's footings; demarcating the dimensions, directing the light and, interestingly, *containing* the sea. This segues into scenes of God's caregiver role. He is shepherd to the stars (38:32), chef to the lions and ravens (38:39-41) and midwife to the mountain goats (39:1-3). God's custodial activities directly impact Job's cry. God shows Job not only that He created everything but, more importantly, that He takes care of it. "When have I ever failed to do what is needed?" is the implied message. Although this is not yet a complete answer to Job's angry protestations of maltreatment, it is an observation of significance. If Job were able to find mental peace – no easy task in his condition – this could be strengthening. He might hear the message, as we might today: if God takes care of the needs of the lions, ravens and mountain goats, will He not attend my need also?

4 God reveals the stars are led out "in their seasons"; snow and hail are reserved for "times of trouble" and "days of battle." God "counts the months" until the mountain goats are ready to produce offspring. These subtle mentions of days, months and seasons are pregnant with meaning. God shows Job there is *a right time* for His care to arrive. A time He knows, which others may not. Again, if Job is able to hear it – and in his position I myself almost certainly could not, so these comments are not designed to criticize Job – the beginnings of solace can be located. I believe God is hinting to Job that restoration is close at hand.

5 A curious detail which will later prove important concerns God's description of the sea. Even in the blameless physical creation, God metaphorically identifies the sea with an evil personality. He names the sea "proud": something which His power needs to constrain "behind doors" and keep "shut up" (38:8-11). Interestingly, even Job refers to the sea as an evil thing (7:12).

Pride is the only personality trait mentioned in God's speech and even then it is only subtly referenced. But it proves vital to the message.

6 The speech draws more and more towards animals. Light, darkness and the Earth itself have a couple of mentions, as do the weather and constellations. But when God speaks of animals, His discourse expands: no fewer than nine different species warrant inclusion in His speech. Some expositors have laboriously attempted to find distinct interpretations for each animal,¹⁸⁰ which I feel strains the text. I suggest that God is drawing attention to one thing particularly: the multiplicity of wildness.

All animals mentioned are necessarily wild: beyond the control of man. Some are naturally wild, such as lion and eagle, but even where God names domesticated species, such as goat, ox and donkey, He deliberately specifies the untamed variety. "Who let the *wild* donkey go free?" (39:5) "Will the *wild* ox consent to serve you?" (39:9). This too underscores God's Supremacy (although I believe He is leading Job's thoughts this way for a more important reason), by implying: "If you can't control the physical beasts I made, why do you think your theology can control Me?"

7 There is a curiously asymmetric distribution of the genera of beasts presented, highlighting an important omission. Five are mammals and four birds; but there are no sea beasts. That's surprising! Clearly God could have chosen three land creatures, three sea creatures and three birds, in perfect symmetric expression of His Lordship of Heaven, Earth and Sea, which is so commonly lauded in scripture (e.g. Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6) but He didn't.

¹⁸⁰ Gregory, "Moralia, sive Expositio in Job," 595 AD, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 30

The striking asymmetry is deliberate. God has defined the sea as the source of pride (38:11) and He does not wish to address the contents of that arena in this speech. This subtle omission allows us to anticipate that the sea, metaphorically the source of pride, and the Beast that arises therefrom, is the direction for the finale.

Gutierrez postulates that God displays wild beasts to underscore their freedom; that God is suggesting that Job should explore a life outside of the restrictions of theological ideology, as free as the world God made.¹⁸¹ I suggest God is saying: “The world that is wild to you is tame to Me.” Considering Job’s life has run wild and he has lost everything, there is subtle comfort available. “If there’s something you can’t control, Job,” says God, “bring it to Me. I can.”

7.1.2 Names of God in the Book of Job

I have been lazy in reporting the Hebrew words translated as “God” in the book of Job.

The three common Hebrew terms for God are:

- ‘Elohim,’ commonly translated “God.”
- ‘El Shaddai,’ commonly translated “God Almighty.”
- His Name: ‘YHVH,’ commonly translated “the LORD.”

These three words appear throughout the book of Job. But while the two descriptive terms, ‘Shaddai’ and ‘Elohim’ are common throughout the debate, they fade out in the speeches and epilogue, giving way to God’s Name, variously transliterated and translated: “YHWH,” “Yahweh,” “JHVH,” “Jehovah.” Wars have been fought over the interpretation of the four Hebrew letters (which have formed their own label: ‘Tetragrammaton’ – ironically in Greek – meaning ‘four letters’) and I am not intending to start any more. I am wholly disinterested in trying to assert one specific Anglicized pronunciation of the Hebrew in

¹⁸¹ G. Gutierrez, “On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent,” 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 75

favor of another; over which some pointlessly wrangle. What is valuable is the *meaning* of God's most Holy Name, which is basically agreed as: "I AM." "I AM" appears almost exclusively in God's speeches and the epilogue.

What does this teach us?

The phrase "I AM" is wonderful in communicating total freedom and lack of restriction. In fact anything that follows "I am..." is a specialization, essentially describing limits of the speaker.

Let me explain. I say: "I am British." Americans who hear this, with whom I am now delighted to reside, assume this means I know little of baseball, and sadly they assume correctly (despite some effort on my part to learn). I say: "I am a scientist" and my hearers tend to assume I know nothing of arts or music, which conclusion I heatedly resist. I say: "I am male" and some automatically assume I have no ability to multi-task, on which matter I shall not comment, since I am busy typing. The point is that every clause that comes after "I am" is a specialization which, although implying certain skills, actually more pointedly identifies *limitations*, restrictions of the original proclamation of Being.

By contrast, our Father says: "I AM." Unrestrained, unrestricted, unlimited. His speeches, and the epilogue of Job, carry this message magnificently. All of creation is defined, and restricted, by its material composition, species, gender, habitat, reproductive processes and various idiosyncrasies. Yet through it all, and in it all, there is One – only One – who IS. Who says: "I AM." He IS every species, every variant; every concept, every thought, every dream. He IS. We live amidst the Body of God. It is not by accident or hyperbole that Paul says: "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

In all of creation, I see my Father, who IS.

7.2 Interlude: Job's Unsatisfactory Answer

Pressed by God to respond, Job replies:

“I am unworthy—how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.
I spoke once, but I have no answer—
twice, but I will say no more.” (40:4-5)

God seems displeased with Job's response and presses him further:

“Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.
Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?
Do you have an arm like God's,
and can your voice thunder like his?
Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor,
and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.
Unleash the fury of your wrath,
look at every proud man and bring him low,
look at every proud man and humble him,
crush the wicked where they stand.
Bury them all in the dust together;
shroud their faces in the grave.
Then I myself will admit to you
that your own right hand can save you.” (40:7-14)

(I take these words as an interlude separate from either of the two speeches, though this does not affect my analysis.)

Following a first speech that was hard to understand, things have become even more clouded. Job gives a response which seems a humble acknowledgement of God's superiority,

yet God is clearly dissatisfied! I can only conclude, unfortunately, that Job's answer must have been a little petulant. I suggest Job has not understood the meaning of God's first speech (nor have we, yet, because we need the second speech to see where it is headed) and he has perhaps collapsed, understandably, in dejection and self-sympathy. He has cried to God in his affliction and originally heard nothing. He has subpoenaed God in his anger and merely been straightened out by Elihu the Buzite. And now the Lord he was seeking has finally come and perhaps all Job has heard (as so many commentators wrongly conclude) is that his inferiority means he has no right to question Him. So perhaps Job has simply thrown in the towel and said: "Whatever. I can't get any justice, or even help, so I quit."

But God knows His most excellent servant can produce a better answer, and so prompts him to pick up his cross and walk on. And He provides a vital clue in this interlude to what His speeches are actually centered on: controlling human pride.

7.2.1 God's Focus on Human Pride

The focus of the drama is narrowing ever more acutely onto human pride, and its fatal toxicity. Consider how this focus has inexorably developed:

1 Elihu the Buzite referred solely to pride as the threat to a man's eternal salvation:

“[God] may speak in their ears
and terrify them with warnings,
to turn man from wrongdoing
and keep him from pride,
to preserve his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.” (33:16-18)

God's first speech metaphorical personified the sea as the source of pride, whose proud waves needed to be jailed.

“Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb...
when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
when I said, “This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt?”
(38:8,10-11)

Here in the interlude, God’s focus sharpens yet further onto pride. The “proud man” is explicitly referenced *twice* and, as Elihu had prophetically anticipated, the context is salvation. God says if Job can overcome pride then He is unnecessary; Job can be his own savior. Clearly this is sarcastic hyperbole, but the message is important and sincere. Pride is a killer and only God can control it.

This is the springboard from which we are launched into the second speech.

7.3 God’s Second Speech: Controlling the Beast

15 “Look at the behemoth,
which I made along with you
and which feeds on grass like an ox.
16 What strength he has in his loins,
what power in the muscles of his belly!
17 His tail sways like a cedar;
the sinews of his thighs are close-knit.
18 His bones are tubes of bronze,
his limbs like rods of iron.
19 He ranks first among the works of God,
yet his Maker can approach him with his sword.
20 The hills bring him their produce,
and all the wild animals play nearby.

- 21 Under the lotus plants he lies,
 hidden among the reeds in the marsh.
- 22 The lotuses conceal him in their shadow;
 the poplars by the stream surround him.
- 23 When the river rages, he is not alarmed;
 he is secure, though the Jordan should surge
against his mouth.
- 24 Can anyone capture him by the eyes,
 or trap him and pierce his nose?
- 1 Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook
 or tie down his tongue with a rope?
- 2 Can you put a cord through his nose
 or pierce his jaw with a hook?
- 3 Will he keep begging you for mercy?
 Will he speak to you with gentle words?
- 4 Will he make an agreement with you
 for you to take him as your slave for life?
- 5 Can you make a pet of him like a bird
 or put him on a leash for your girls?
- 6 Will traders barter for him?
 Will they divide him up among the merchants?
- 7 Can you fill his hide with harpoons
 or his head with fishing spears?
- 8 If you lay a hand on him,
 you will remember the struggle and never do it
again!
- 9 Any hope of subduing him is false;
 the mere sight of him is overpowering.
- 10 No one is fierce enough to rouse him.
 Who then is able to stand against me?
- 11 Who has a claim against me that I must pay?
 Everything under heaven belongs to me.
- 12 I will not fail to speak of his limbs,
 his strength and his graceful form.
- 13 Who can strip off his outer coat?

- Who would approach him with a bridle?
14 Who dares open the doors of his mouth,
 ringed about with his fearsome teeth?
15 His back has rows of shields
 tightly sealed together;
16 each is so close to the next
 that no air can pass between.
17 They are joined fast to one another;
 they cling together and cannot be parted.
18 His snorting throws out flashes of light;
 his eyes are like the rays of dawn.
19 Firebrands stream from his mouth;
 sparks of fire shoot out.
20 Smoke pours from his nostrils
 as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.
21 His breath sets coals ablaze,
 and flames dart from his mouth.
22 Strength resides in his neck;
 dismay goes before him.
23 The folds of his flesh are tightly joined;
 they are firm and immovable.
24 His chest is hard as rock,
 hard as a lower millstone.
25 When he rises up, the mighty are terrified;
 they retreat before his thrashing.
26 The sword that reaches him has no effect,
 nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin.
27 Iron he treats like straw
 and bronze like rotten wood.
28 Arrows do not make him flee;
 slingstones are like chaff to him.
29 A club seems to him but a piece of straw;
 he laughs at the rattling of the lance.
30 His undersides are jagged potsherds,
 leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge.

31 He makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron
and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment.
32 Behind him he leaves a glistening wake;
one would think the deep had white hair.
33 Nothing on earth is his equal—
a creature without fear.
34 He looks down on all that are haughty;
he is king over all that are proud.”
(40:15-41:34, verse numbers included)

At first read, I have far more questions than answers. What are Behemoth and Leviathan? How can any of this be relevant to Job?

And why are there two speeches, anyway?

7.3.1 Why Two Speeches?

It should surprise us that God makes two speeches, because none of the reasons a human speaker would speak twice apply in the case of the Almighty. God isn't going to have forgotten anything in His first speech, nor is Job going to have raised any issues in the interlude that God didn't see coming. We must conclude God always intended to speak twice, which implies He always had two distinct things to say.

I suggest God's first speech focuses on the *natural* creation, but the second concerns the *spiritual* creation. If this is true, it obviously follows that Behemoth and Leviathan are not physical creatures, but spiritual ones.

This is God's normal *modus operandi*, to work first on the physical plane and then on the spiritual. This couplet is pervasive in God's relationship with His children, on both the global and individual scale. Three brief examples:

- The Testaments (covenants). First, the Mosaic covenant: the basis of the Bible's Old Testament, whose practices were typified by physical offerings. Its fruition came in the surpassing glory of the New Testament, the second

covenant in Jesus Christ, whose practices are centered around spiritual disciplines and offerings (2 Corinthians 3:7-11). Effectively God's whole communication to mankind, the Bible, comes in two speeches, not one.

- The Kings of Israel. The first was Saul, the physical giant, who failed. Then came David, the spiritual giant (1 Samuel 13:13-14) who showed Israel the Heart of the Father.
- The development of the disciple. First a man is born physically, yet to be a disciple he needs to be born again, spiritually, to exist on the spiritual plane and find true communion with the Father (John 3:3-8).

Encompassing the many aspects of this theme, Paul writes of the 'brothers' Adam and Jesus, the first the natural son of God, the second the spiritual Son of God:

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

(1 Corinthians 15:44-46)

This is the way God works. First the natural, then the spiritual.

7.3.2 Weaknesses of Interpreting

Behemoth and Leviathan as Physical Beasts

The vast majority of expositors either assume, or inherit from each other, the thought that Behemoth is a hippopotamus and Leviathan a crocodile.^{182,183,184,185,186} (Or rather they assume

¹⁸² D. Atkinson, "The Message of Job," 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 151

¹⁸³ E. M. Spongberg, "The Book of Job," 1965, private publication, 140-141

¹⁸⁴ N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 3

Behemoth to be hippopotami, presumably, since strictly the noun is plural.¹⁸⁷) I don't want to be dogmatic, but on the interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan I am prompted to speak with some energy. Limiting the interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan to physical beasts is *woefully* inadequate; it allows no valuable meaning to be derived from God's speeches! Let's consider why limiting the interpretations to hippo and crocodile, or similar interpretations such as dinosaur and whale,¹⁸⁸ necessarily fall short.

1 God's style is to work first with the natural and then the spiritual. Jesus, being the express image of his Father, behaves the same way and the feeding of the 5 000 forms a classic example (John 6). First, Jesus fed the multitudes with physical bread. Then he transposed to the spiritual plane and fed them the teaching: "I am the bread from heaven," adding that those who did not eat his flesh and drink his blood would have no life in them. Many of the audience failed to mentally change gear from the physical miracle to the spiritual teaching. As a result, they were offended at Jesus' grotesque-sounding remarks and followed him no longer (John 6:66).

Jesus' feeding of the 4 000 exhibited the identical template (Mark 8:1-21). Again, Jesus first fed the multitudes with physical bread; and then cautioned his disciples spiritually: "Beware of the leaven of Herod." The disciples wrongly assumed Jesus was rebuking them for forgetting to pack bread for their newest journey; and their failure to transition from the natural

¹⁸⁵ R. Gordis, "The Temptation of Job- Tradition versus Experience in Religion," 1955, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 83

¹⁸⁶ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswiell Books, Oswestry, UK, 101-102

¹⁸⁷ J. Strong, "A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Hebrew Bible with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version," in "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance," 1997, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 19

¹⁸⁸ J. V. McGee, "Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job," 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, 186

plane to the spiritual caused Jesus frustration. “Do you still not understand?” he poignantly asked (Mark 8:21).

Let’s not make the same mistake.

2 The interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan as hippo and crocodile makes no credible sense to the development of the drama.

God has already presented nine physical beasts in the first speech. Why would adding two more make any difference? (Some expositors suggest the hippopotamus and crocodile are in a completely different ballpark of physical strength from all other creatures, but this is simply physiologically wrong.)

3 Job clearly understands something after the second speech which he didn’t understand before; because Job’s response to God’s first speech is not acceptable, but his later response is. Is it credible that some fundamentally new understanding came from the consideration of the hippopotamus and the crocodile? Is it even faintly believable that when God said: “Consider the lion, the king of the beasts; consider the war horse, charging into the fray; consider the eagle, soaring above the slain carcass”; Job was still lost to God’s intended message; yet after He said: “Not only that, but I made the hippo and croc too,” Job suddenly cries: “But of course! I see it all now!”?

It simply makes no sense that the second speech is nothing more than a continuation of the first.

4 The descriptions don’t fit.

God’s descriptions of the nine physical beasts in the first speech match the respective animals well. But this is not true for Behemoth and Leviathan being a hippopotamus and crocodile. Behemoth’s tail sways like a cedar tree (40:17). Rays of light glow from Leviathan’s eyes, smoke coils from his nostrils and flames burst from his mouth (41:18-20). Those who suppose these

descriptions are limited to the descriptions of hippopotamus and crocodile clearly have some explaining to do!

The hippopotamus' tail is scarcely larger than a man's forearm. While informed sources reveal that the flabby-looking appendage actually has some strength, it clearly doesn't 'sway like a cedar tree.' (In fairness McGee's postulated dinosaur¹⁸⁹ conceivably fares better here). And the light rays that shine from the crocodile's eyes, or the firebrands that stream from his mouth? Presumably at this point all the expositors supporting a strictly physical interpretation merely cough and look at their feet. Suffice to say the argument fails.

5 At the depth of his despair in his first lament, Job called for the rousing of Leviathan:

“May the day of my birth perish,
and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’
...That night—may thick darkness seize it;
may it not be included among the days of the year
nor be entered in any of the months.
May that night be barren;
may no shout of joy be heard in it.
May those who curse days curse that day,
those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.” (3:3-8)

The intensity and power of this piercing cry is reduced to nothing if we now suggest that Job is merely calling for a crocodile to wake up. Job is speaking with appropriate hyperbole to invoke a supernatural, if mythical, beast who is able to wreak havoc upon the Earth.

¹⁸⁹ J. V. McGee, *Ibid*

7.3.3 Evidence in Support of Behemoth and Leviathan as Human Pride

There is some meager support in the literature for the interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan on the spiritual plane, as symbols of wickedness,^{190,191,192} or even a rebellious spirit within Job himself.¹⁹³ Baird mixes the two ideas, allowing Leviathan as a potential symbol of sin, with which he offers excellent comparisons with God's subjugation of Egypt and Babylon; while interpreting Behemoth strictly physically as the inevitable hippopotamus.¹⁹⁴

Baird elucidates the comparisons between the subjugation of Leviathan and God's subjugation of the former slavemasters of Israel:

“...God tamed Sennacherib, the great enemy of Israel and blasphemer, not with a fish hook but a nose ring (Isa. 37:29). The same sort of ring, not a brittle thorn or a fragile bulrush, was figuratively passed through the jaw of Pharaoh, king of Egypt (Ezek. 29:4).”¹⁹⁵

Gregory I, who became Pope of the Catholic church in the sixth century, understood both beasts to be symbols of Satan,¹⁹⁶ a view with which I wholly concur and will attempt to reinforce.

I claim these things:

- Behemoth and Leviathan are spiritual beasts

¹⁹⁰ L. G. Sargent, “Ecclesiastes and Other Studies,” 1965, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, UK, 133

¹⁹¹ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 80

¹⁹² P. Claudel, “Le Livre de Job,” 1946, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 44

¹⁹³ N. C. Habel, “The Book of Job: A Commentary,” 1985, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 559-561

¹⁹⁴ D. Baird, “The Education of Job,” 2002, Stallard & Potter, Torrensville, Australia, 290-294

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 294

¹⁹⁶ Gregory, *Ibid*, 30

- Behemoth and Leviathan are, in fact, progressive facades of one and the same beast
- That one beast is Human Pride
- (Human Pride is The Satan; the Opponent of God introduced in the opening scene of the drama)
- Therefore God speaks to reveal the identity of the Satan, the character who has been hidden since the prologue!

The fourth point is listed parenthetically because we have already presented our reasoning for it in chapter 3.

Even if these claims are shown to be true, they still don't fully explain what God is saying – that will be considered later. For now I want to focus purely on making a careful identification of Behemoth and Leviathan so that we can move forward in trying to hear what God is saying in the second speech; and thereby retrospectively translate the first speech also.

1 The scripture's style is to present first the natural creation and then the spiritual. While this does not prove that Behemoth and Leviathan are spiritual beasts, an interpretation of them as spiritual beasts would dovetail perfectly with this generic protocol.

2 The detail of description of Behemoth and Leviathan is at an entirely different level from the beasts in the first speech. In the first speech, nine beasts are presented in 33 verses. Behemoth and Leviathan are allocated 44 verses. This infers that Behemoth and Leviathan are on a fundamentally different plane from the beasts in the previous speech.

3 The descriptions of the beasts in the first speech comprise primarily physical parameters. But the beasts in the second speech are generally referred to with personality traits and

characteristics: essentially spiritual parameters. They also detail a *relationship with man*, which Renan also noticed¹⁹⁷ (Table 7_1).

Attributes of the beasts in God's first speech: Physical characteristics	Attributes of the beasts in God's second speech: Spiritual characteristics
"hunt prey"	"No man can capture him"
"satisfy hunger"	"He won't beg for mercy"
"young cry for food"	"Can't make a pet of him"
"crouch down to give birth"	"Any hope of subduing him is false"
"range the hills for pasture"	"Mighty men retreat before his thrashing"
"lay eggs carelessly"	"Nothing on Earth is his equal"
"spread wings to the south"	"He is King of the Proud"

Table 7_1: Contrast between the physical characteristics of the beasts in God's first speech with the spiritual characteristics of the beasts in God's second speech.

Clearly the characteristics of Behemoth and Leviathan are spiritual and affect man *powerfully*. The verses speak of overpowering man; *a wildness he cannot control*.

4 The personality of Behemoth and Leviathan match the proud man very well. Consider:

a) Behemoth ranks first among God's works (40:19)

This is most naturally interpreted as man, who was placed in supremacy above the creation.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

¹⁹⁷ E. Renan, "Le Livre de Job," 1859, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 117

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

(Genesis 1:27-28)

In fact, any interpretation except man, e.g. the hippopotamus, would be hard to justify.

b) Behemoth has bones of bronze (40:18)

I don't want to travel too far in speculation or over-interpretation, but I suggest bronze, which commonly is coupled with iron in scriptural passages (e.g. Deuteronomy 33:25; Psalm 107:16; Jeremiah 1:18), represents stubbornness towards God. Bronze and iron were the two hardest metals known (e.g. 37:18) which forms a good model for an intractable mindset. In ancient days bronze was chosen for helmets (1 Samuel 17:5-6,38); a hard metal to protect the most vital part of the body. Today bronze is the commonest material for casting sculptures; precisely because when the sculptor has finished molding the malleable clay, he or she uses the hardest material for casting so that the shape is preserved.

God is looking to mold His people, so understandably bronze has a negative connotation: it is unyielding and cannot be fashioned. It's appropriate for casting the finished sculpture, but we are not finished objects! We are in need of continued molding all the days of our lives. So God uses bronze to describe the stubborn intractability of his people.

“For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze... You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them? From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you... You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open.

To Speak Well of God

Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.” (Isaiah 48:4,6,8)

“I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.” (Leviticus 26:19)

“They are all hardened rebels, going about to slander. They are bronze and iron; they all act corruptly.”
(Jeremiah 6:28)

A singularly pertinent example is God’s command to form the bronze serpent, during the Israelite’s wilderness journey, to represent their stubborn pride. Once the people had looked upon the bronze snake and identified with their stubbornness, God healed them of the punishment He had brought on them for their rebellion (Numbers 21:4-9).

c) Fire shoots from Leviathan’s mouth (41:19-21)

This is one of the parameters that dismantled any attempt at a physical interpretation of Leviathan. So is there an element of the spiritual creation which shoots fire from its mouth? Yes, there is. The New Testament disciple James, who referenced Job, interestingly (James 5:11) and was therefore presumably reflecting upon the Joban drama, reveals the answer.

“Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” (James 3:5-6)

The creature who scorches the world with the fiery conflagrations of his mouth is the proud man who does not curb his tongue!

d) The opening and closing line of the speech.

The opening and closing spoken lines of the book of Job are on the same theme of speaking about God. This sets a precedent for us to be sensitive to the opening and closing lines in God's speeches.

i) The opening line: "Behemoth who... I made along with you" (40:15)

Effectively, God says: "I made you with your own free will. Implanted within you. The will to either humbly serve me or stubbornly resist my guidance." That is to say: "Behemoth! ...who I made along with you." The plural nature of the word Behemoth assists in understanding that this beast lurks in every human heart. The continuation of the speech bears the message: "By direct consequence, if you are to be my child, some sort of taming of the beast is needed if you are to grow towards me. The Word of God can control that beast. Can you?" The book of Job thus beautifully encapsulates this central Bible message within its single, compact drama.

ii) The closing line: "He is King of the Proud" (41:34)

Without doubt the proudest creature on Earth is man. An obvious scriptural case study is afforded by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. For brief context, Nebuchadnezzar had been warned in a dream that, because of his pride, the Lord God would humble him for a time, until his humility resurfaced.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be

driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

(Daniel 4:28-34)

What is notable is the manner in which God chooses to humble Nebuchadnezzar. He chooses to make him live like a wild animal because of his brazen pride. God essentially says: “If you’re going to behave like a wild beast, I’ll make you live like a wild beast.” Two things derive from this. First, God sees pride as a wild beast. Second, only God’s Word, not human effort, can tame the Beast. This dovetails perfectly with our interpretation of God’s second speech to Job.

Additionally, the ‘King of the Proud’ comment is the closing remark of the Almighty’s speeches; the words left to reverberate in the ears and minds of the audience. So it’s highly likely to be pertinent. And that phrase describes Leviathan simply: The King of Pride.

5 Leviathan, the latter and more fearsome of the two descriptions of the Beast, is from the sea. God defined the sea as the source of *pride*, which needed to be restrained by His direct control (38:8-11). God refrained from including any sea beasts in

that first speech, where He focused on the innocent wildness of the natural creation. He then segued into the second speech to speak of the thrashing, fiery, indomitable Beast that arose from the oceans of pride.

This picture connects well with scriptural imagery portraying “seas” as the nations, especially those adrift from God’s guidance (e.g. Revelation 17:15, and I suggest it is useful to read Luke 21:25 this way). This strengthens the notion that the source of pride is from the hosts of men who are not able to be molded by the gentle parenting of their Loving Father.

Interestingly, even Eden’s serpent, also referred to as Satan, the eternal opponent of God (Revelation 12:9) can be shown to be a creature deriving from the sea (i.e. from creation’s Day 5 and not, as commonly supposed, from Day 6).¹⁹⁸ All these themes tie perfectly together here in God’s second revelation to Job.

6 In the other scriptural references to Leviathan, he represents Egypt (Psalm 74) and Babylon (Isaiah 27).

But you, O God, are my king from of old;
you bring salvation upon the earth.
It was you who split open the sea by your power;
you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.
It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan
and gave him as food to the creatures of the
desert.
It was you who opened up springs and streams;
you dried up the ever flowing rivers.
(Psalm 74:12-15)

¹⁹⁸ J. A. Pople, “John’s Creation: A Model for Understanding the Gospel of John,” 2005, Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation, Bloomington, IL, USA, 17-19

In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea. In that day— “Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.” (Isaiah 27:1-3)

The signature feature of Egypt and Babylon is that they are the only two nations that held the children of God captive, until God freed them. Thus, for the Leviathan in God’s second speech to represent pride makes good sense. On the spiritual plane it is sin, the prideful decision to serve self rather than one’s Creator, which holds the disciple of God captive (Romans 7:24-25). As with captivity in Egypt and Babylon, the direct intervention of the Hand of God is the only mechanism by which the disciple can be freed.

7.4 God Answers Job

Although we have done little more than articulate an understanding of Behemoth and Leviathan, we are now in a position to discern the message of God’s speeches to Job, and how Job understands them and is enriched by the understanding.

The briefest of recaps tells us the main thread of the story so far. The Satan flaunts his prideful slanders of both Job and God before the Almighty (ch 1-2). He then becomes locked in debate with the righteous man, inevitably, since they are natural enemies. The righteous man is able to rebut the Satan’s ill-thought reasoning, *but is unable to overcome his pride* – the very essence of the Satan – and becomes infected with it himself.

We can now see that part of the reason God chose to speak when He did was to *rescue* Job. God had seen Job flagging under the persistent assaults of the self-righteous Satan and,

finally, succumbing in anger to self-righteous pride himself. So God designs His speeches to highlight what has been happening all this time, so that Job can perceive it and be saved. God approaches His theme obliquely. “Do you have much success controlling wild beasts, Job?” is the vehicle of the first message. Job, not seeing where this train of thought is leading, feels hurt and offended, as if his appeals for reunion with God and justification of his blameless life have been ignored. So he sullenly refuses to answer more than a few words assenting his inadequacy. But God displays more patience with Job and, transitioning His thoughts to the spiritual plane, He describes THE Wild Beast: Human Pride. The beast which has broken free and has been rampaging around centre stage in the drama; causing the inevitable damage signature to his being. “So if you can’t control physical wild beasts,” the Lord continues in His second speech, “how do you expect to control THE wild beast, Job? Do you recognize this beast? Let me describe him to you. Have you seen him anywhere recently?” And such is the brilliance of Job that, even on first hearing of the second speech, he understands!!

His restoration, and the salvation of those held by the Satan, can now begin in earnest.

It is *essential* to interpret Behemoth and Leviathan as the manifestation of the destructive Beast of human pride, which no man can overcome, to arrive at this conclusion. Consider the alternative. Job has been smitten physically and emotionally, covered in boils, bereaved of all his children and deprived of his wealth and social standing. He has then been attacked by his self-righteous friends and hollered to the heavens for deliverance. Is it even faintly credible that, when the Lord he has been seeking finally arrives, He expounds two speeches which culminate in the message: “Look what a great job I did designing the crocodile”?! God’s speeches would be ludicrously off topic (which Williams

has vicariously noted in his novel¹⁹⁹) and His character self-centered and uncaring! Ask yourself: is this your God?

We can take comfort that this is not so. We have seen God's speeches are insightful, on topic and, above all, *helpful* to the cries from the disciple He loves.

Did we really expect any different?

7.4.1 Job Understands God's Answer

“May the day of my birth perish,
and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’
...May those who curse days curse that day,
those who are ready to rouse Leviathan.” (3:3,8)

The intensity of Job's pain caused him to call for mythical Leviathan to wreak havoc upon the Earth. I'm not suggesting Job perceived God understood the most destructive force as human pride, but in a tragic realization of the age-old adage: “be careful what you wish for,” Leviathan came! Job was not to recognize him when he entered, but he surely came: first in his friends' self-righteousness and latterly, tragically, in Job's speech also.

“Surely I would wear [my defense] on my shoulder,
I would put it on like a crown.
I would give [God] an account of my every step;
like a prince I would approach him.” (31:36-37)

Job describes himself as a prince. God counters by revealing in whose court he served:

“[Leviathan] looks down on all that are haughty;
he is king over all [princes?] that are proud.”
(41:34)

¹⁹⁹ C. Williams, “War in Heaven,” 1947, Faber, London, UK, 24

Job is so brilliantly insightful in the service of the true King that he immediately perceives and understands the thrust of God's answer. He understands God has revealed the enemy that had slipped under Job's defenses and which, like any undetected enemy, is the most potent. Most importantly, Job realizes the intervention of God has not acted primarily to correct his errors (although God has done that) nor to reveal the Satanic nature of his friends (although He has done that too), but to snatch him, as a valued possession from the fire, from the very jaws of Leviathan and his own potential destruction!

Job understands he has not just been answered. He has been saved. And the mechanism of his salvation has been the proximate presence of his Maker. The relatively minor event of Job's correction has spoken to the relatively minor theme of the Supremacy of God, and the major event of Job's salvation has spoken to the major theme of the loving character of that Supreme Father.

The effect of this revelation has to be tremendously comforting and liberating. Job saw his friends' pride exposed as the godless folly it was yet, godly man that he was, that was neither his primary concern nor celebration. He saw that he had never been distanced from his God, except when he nearly slipped into the jaws of Leviathan, and this understanding addressed and salved his most relevant fear: that God had left him. Moreover, he could see he had been employed, through the heavy burden of his suffering, to be the foil by which the deadly pride of his friends could be drawn out for God to confront and destroy. He had been employed as a Savior! Job can now feel both connected to God and greatly valued by Him. Little wonder he now replies:

“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.
You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,

and you shall answer me.’
My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.” (42:3-5)
But then he adds:

“Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.” (42:6)

This closing line doesn’t match the relieved, joyous, celebratory tone I have suggested Job is feeling – in fact it’s a statement in sharp discord. It reads like a man who has been beaten down by the Almighty, a man whom God has ‘put in his place,’ as almost all expositors suggest.^{200,201,202,203,204,205,206} We will explore a happy solution for this apparent contradiction in the next chapter.

7.4.2 If Behemoth is Leviathan, Why the Repeat?

An obvious question yet remains. If Behemoth and Leviathan are personifications of the same human trait, why are two different visions given by God? Wouldn’t a picture of one or the other be enough?

There is direct scriptural precedent which will solve the question of why two visions are given when one might have sufficed. The answer stems from the time when Joseph was in Egypt. Pharaoh had received two visions: one of seven starved cows consuming seven fat cows; then one of seven malnourished ears of wheat consuming seven healthy ears. Pharaoh was tormented by his inability to understand those dreams. Joseph

²⁰⁰ N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 8

²⁰¹ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 157

²⁰² J. V. McGee, “Thru the Bible Commentary Series: Job,” 1991, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, USA, 188

²⁰³ D. Baird, *Ibid*, 304

²⁰⁴ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 112

²⁰⁵ L. G. Sargent, *Ibid*, 134

²⁰⁶ E. M. Spongberg, *Ibid*, 143

appealed to the Lord for understanding, and through the granted prayer was able to explain the two dreams to Pharaoh. There was about to be seven healthy years of crops, followed by a seven year drought so severe it would consume all the bounty of the previous seven years. God had only one message to communicate, one scenario to describe, but He sent two dreams. Joseph explicitly clarifies this:

Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same.” (Genesis 41:25)

Why then two dreams? Again through the mediating voice of Joseph, God explains:

“The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.” (Genesis 41:32)

We can now understand the duplicity of the Behemoth and Leviathan vision. There have been two visions, carrying the same basic message: only the Word of God can tame human pride. Why present this vision using two forms? Using the scripture to interpret itself: because God has firmly decided that He will bring judgment on the Beast and He will do it soon.

And what follows in the very next verses?

“I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” (42:7-8)

Judgment on the Beast! This is additional evidence of the identification of Satan as the office inhabited by the three friends. The two visions that are one vision prove that the Word of God would tame the Satan very soon and the very next scene reveals God speaking in judgment against the three friends' pride!

Additional support for Behemoth and Leviathan being aspects of the same beast is seen in God's references to 'their' supremacy. God presents both of them as the 'Number 1' beast, yet it's obviously impossible to have more than one premier. Consider:

God says of Behemoth: "He ranks first among the works of God" (40:19). So Behemoth is King! But if he's king, that must mean he's above Leviathan. But then Leviathan is *also* presented as the premier beast, said to be "King over all that are proud" (41:34). So he too is King!

In fact, Leviathan is implicitly described as stronger than Behemoth. Behemoth's bones are made of iron and bronze (40:18), yet Leviathan treats iron and bronze as straw and rotten wood (41:27). Leviathan crushes Behemoth's bones.

There can't be two 'Number 1' beasts. Does God merely contradict Himself? Of course not. What then? Behemoth *is* Leviathan (*is* Human Pride). And in terms of destructive forces on the beauty of the spiritual world God has crafted, he is Spiritual Enemy #1, i.e. THE Satan.

7.4.3 Behemoth and Leviathan: a Progressive Beast

I am not wavering from the interpretation that Behemoth and Leviathan both represent human pride, yet it is possible to see a progression between the two representations.²⁰⁷ For context, consider the number of progressions we've seen in the book of Job:

- In the Satan's demands in the prologue. When he lost the first barter he immediately negotiated a second, which was even more challenging for Job.

²⁰⁷ I am grateful to Geoff Higgs for assisting my thinking along these lines.

- Throughout the speeches of Satan in the debate. The dominant tone of the speeches developed, from observation, through interpretation, to condemnation.
- In the discipleship of Job (which we will explore in the next chapter). The motivation for Job's blameless service progresses from fear, at the beginning of the drama, to the fundamentally closer communion of love, at the end.
- In God's two speeches. The first speech described the physical universe, the second described the spiritual.
- Within God's first speech. The opening half reveals Him as the creator of the natural world, the second half reveals Him as the caregiver to all He has made.

Considering all these progressions, it is reasonable, arguably even likely, that we will see a progression in the second speech also, between the beasts Behemoth and Leviathan. At first glance, we see God focuses more on Leviathan. In fact there is a neat arithmetic ratio in evidence. Behemoth is described in 10 verses: about three times more detail than the average of the nine physical beasts in the first speech. Leviathan is then described in 34 verses, about three times more detail again. There's a progression of detail: from the physical beasts, to Behemoth, to Leviathan.

The growing focus onto Leviathan is highlighted by other subtle mechanisms also. God begins in the first speech with plural beasts of nine different species. In the second speech, on the spiritual plane, He refines the analysis to plural beasts of one species: Behemoth (Behemoth is a plural noun). Finally God draws the focus to the One Beast: Leviathan; the centerpiece of His revelation to Job.

There may be a third progression drawing the focus to Leviathan, concerning the relation the beasts have with the sea (the source of pride: 38:8-11). The beasts in the first speech have no connection to the sea: five are mammals, four are birds. Behemoth is described as an amphibious species, spending some

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time on land and some in the water; at least a river. Finally, Leviathan is presented as a beast deriving solely from the sea (Table 7_2).

	Degree of Detail (no. of verses)	Plurality of beasts	Creatures relation with the sea
Physical beasts of Speech 1	3.7 (average)	Plural beasts, plural species	None – all land or air creatures
Behemoth	10 ($\approx 3 \times 3.7$)	Plural beasts, one species	Partial - amphibious
Leviathan	34 ($\approx 3 \times 10$)	The One Beast	Total: of the sea

Table 7_2: Three literary mechanisms which are used to draw the focus of God's answer towards the Beast of the Sea: Leviathan.

Finally and most importantly, Leviathan is presented as significantly more dangerous than Behemoth. The Behemoth are described as big hulking brutes: the ultimate 'immovable objects,' who plump down under the lotus plants and are alarmed at nothing, not even a raging river. They can be cowed by their Maker alone. Behemoth are huge powerful lumps, evidently, but they are not described as hunters or fighters, indeed they are vegetarian.

Not so Leviathan. He is proactively hostile. Flames from his mouth are a weapon he utilizes. He thrashes around, rather than lying inert under the lotus plants. He rises up of his own accord and terrifies mighty men. In fact the many verses indicating man's inability to damage him with any of his armaments indicates man is in constant conflict with Leviathan, yet never successfully so.

I see these as different aspects of human pride: pride in both its passive 'vegetarian' form and its active, predatory one. I see Behemoth as stubbornness: the hulking, inertia-laden lump

that no man can move: hence the bones of bronze (40:18). I see Leviathan as active pride: the self-righteous, thrashing, rampaging beast that damages not only the one it attacks but also, more subtly, yet more severely, the one who hosts it in his heart. Leviathan is the only thing superior to Behemoth, being the more aggressive form of the same thing. Hence Leviathan treats even iron and bronze, the very bones of mighty Behemoth, like straw and rotten wood (41:27) as stubbornness explodes in the voracious activity of self-glory.

7.5 Reflection

I'm struck by the implication of the length of God's speeches to Job. They are the longest spoken revelations of God anywhere in the Bible. While it is likely the Father may have communicated more with His Son Jesus in moments of private communion – what it would be to hear some of those mountain-top revelations! – they are not recorded in the scriptural text we hold. (Nor should I be greedy; Paul reminds us we are blessed with every sufficiency: 2 Corinthians 9:8). So while Job's situation is indeed horrific, this is an incredible privilege to receive such lengthy, personalized communication from God Himself! Job can rightly feel well favored to hear this much direct revelation from his Maker and this is surely no accident that God's longest recorded speeches are delivered to this persevering priest of His. It is a direct and public affirmation of Job's favor. In fact, the length contrasts strikingly with God's 'speeches' to the Satan in the prologue, which are no more than a handful of words. I'm convinced the dramatic difference highlights God's approval of Job, and His corresponding disapproval of the Satan.

The subject matter of God's speeches is also enthralling. God reminds Job of the immense beauty of the natural world, quite possibly because the appreciation of the physical world, just in itself, can be an effective anodyne to suffering. It is always

appropriate to maintain infant wonderment in the Creation. It is part of those child-like aspects essential for anyone who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:1-4). I wonder if you've ever felt you don't spend enough time in active appreciation of the world's beauty. To find a time of stillness and sit at the crest of a hill, by the side of a lake, in a softly carpeted forest or on a remote sandy beach by the gently booming ocean can bring a sense of wellbeing and inner peace to even the most troubled soul. Exactly why this is I am not qualified to explain, but empirical experience certainly justifies the claim. Possibly it's because of the vast scale of detail one is able to observe even in a single frame of the natural world, which acts as a compelling reminder of our smallness, without being a depressing or belittling revelation. I recall looking at a mountain face while driving north to Ukiah, in Northern California, and being almost mentally overloaded when I tried to regard every crenellation of the rock face. At that level of resolution the face seemed to stretch for miles and I was immediately aware it was only one face in an extended range which itself was but a tiny fraction of the landscape I could see.

Time spent in the proximal company of the natural world is simply a way to be further away from the selfish clamor of the world we have made. We can connect more closely to the expressions of the Almighty; and thereby connect vicariously with Him. Atkinson aptly stated: "It is by enjoying the Creator's handiwork that we often begin to feel again the touch of the Creator's hand."²⁰⁸ All too often the mind in pain focuses inwards. Peake commented: "[Job] needed to have the detail bitten into his imagination, that the vague generality might become vivid and concrete. For much of the mischief with Job lay in his self-absorption."²⁰⁹ An appreciation of the vast and beautiful world beyond our slender horizons sets in perspective

²⁰⁸ D. Atkinson, *Ibid*, 147

²⁰⁹ A. S. Peake, "The Problem of Suffering in the Old Testament," 1904, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 203

our perceived discomfort and thereby helps salve it. God's illustrations of creation's beauty paints a picture with which Job can stand outside of himself to find a modicum of comfort. God essentially says to him: "I see your pain. Let's take a walk in My garden. Trust Me, it'll help."

We also see God's teaching style centers around questions; this is true throughout the Bible. He operates this way with both the Satan and the Righteous Man:

- To the Satan:
"Where have you come from?" (1:7)
"Have you considered my servant Job?" (1:8)
- Again to the Satan:
"Where have you come from?" (2:2)
"Have you considered my servant Job?" (2:3)

- To the Righteous Man:
"Who is this that darkens counsel with words without knowledge?" (38:2)
- Again to the Righteous Man:
"Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (40:8)

God's questions posed to the Satan are identical, yet those to the Righteous Man develop. I suggest this is because the Satan makes no useful response to God's questions; he makes no useful progress in his theology. The questions posed to him don't develop because he is not developing. But questioning the righteous man draws him closer to speaking well of his God. This is the conclusion which God announces when He speaks for the third time to both parties (the fifth time in all).

I identified the Satan as human pride; most obviously emulated, or hosted, by the three friends. By concluding Leviathan is God's picture of the same trait, we can see a simple and beautiful symmetry in the drama.

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In the prologue, God speaks to the Satan.
He asks him to consider the nature of the Righteous Man.

In the main movement, God speaks to the Righteous Man.
He asks him to consider the nature of the Satan.

Even before we explore why God does this, it's an attractive symmetry, underscoring the inherent simplicity of the Joban tale (an irony given that the book has proven the source of more debate and confusion than almost any other in the Biblical library!).

This symmetry has one final incarnation:

In the epilogue, God speaks to the Righteous Man and the Satan.
He asks them to consider each other.

Then the symmetry breaks. God asks the Righteous Man to convey His salvation to the Satan. For ultimately only one of the parties has strength in the universe.

There is an additional contrasting symmetry for our appreciation. In both God's conversation in the prologue and God's speeches to Job something is made clear to the reader and something else is hidden. In the prologue, the subject matter, the Righteous Man, is clearly identified; but the character of the second party, the Satan, is obscure and needs to be carefully interpreted. By interesting contrast, here in God's speeches the reverse is true. The party to whom God speaks is obvious: it's Job, but the subject matter, the nature of the Satan, is obscured in graphic vision. In both cases it is only with careful work that the obscure portion of each conversation can be solved and then the fullness of the symmetric beauty opens like a flower.

In each case the Righteous Man is plainly revealed to the audience, whether he is the subject of God's speech (ch 1) or the recipient (ch 38-41). By contrast the Satan is the one obscured both times. This presents an attractive graphical argument. The

Righteous Man is plainly visible, in the light, while the Satan lurks in shadow and is hard to detect. This melds effortlessly with the common scriptural theme of associating light with godliness and darkness with oblivion (e.g. John 1), which theme is also explicitly proselytized in God's first speech (38:12-13).

This allows a simple but profound *definition* of a righteous man and a Satan. In the opening exchange, we reasoned *Satan never heard the Word of God*. He was never aware the conversation was in progress. I understand this as a useful *definition* of the Satan, the opponent of God: he can't hear God's words.

I am well aware of friends of mine, whom I greatly value, who would immediately refuse to be involved in discussion of the Word of God. I perceive they would be acutely embarrassed were the subject to be broached. They simply cannot (actually, will not) hear the Word of God. In fact, as I type these very words, I overhear a friend say: "I have never been happier in my life than right now. I don't have time to think about anything. As long as I don't have time to think about anything I'm fine." Is there a more poignant definition of the human condition? As long as we deliberately keep ourselves unaware of our true circumstances, perhaps by filling our lives with busy-ness so we can't stop to consider the plight of our existence, we have the ability to be happy? What a tragedy! English etymology testifies similarly. In the English language the highest state of happiness is described as 'ecstasy.' The word 'ecstasy' derives from Latin (ex-stasis): to stand (stasis) outside (ex) oneself. How sad, yet how plausible, that the highest form of human happiness can only be attained if we distract, even divorce, our minds from our real situation.

By contrast, the Righteous Man is defined by the Joban drama as the one who is able to hear the Words of God and the message they impart. Not only that, but the book of Job shows us that while Satan cannot hear God *because* of his own pride, the righteous man can hear God even if the subject *is* his own pride!

The more I see these symmetries, the more I'm struck how wonderfully 'small' the book of Job truly is. The entire

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drama is played out with a very small cast of characters and, though the material and message of the book is stunningly deep and profound, that message is borne through surprisingly simplistic and symmetric interactions of the characters involved. It is truly a beautiful book.

Let's return to the drama. "I AM" has spoken, and his excellent servant has heard Him. We advance to the conclusion. The Word of God has interceded and has brought (arguably) the *only* thing that the Word of God can bring, and (unarguably) the thing that *only* the Word of God can bring.

Salvation.

“You will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”

John 8:32

Chapter 8
Salvation

8.1 The Effect on Job's Friends

8.1.1 Priest After the Order of Melchizedek

8.1.2 The Suffering of a Righteous Man

8.2 The Effect on Job

8.2.1 From Fear to Faith

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8.4.1 Did Job Succeed or Fail?

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8.5 Reflection

Salvation

It is quite reasonable to read the book of Job and ask: “What is Job’s suffering for? Does it have a purpose? If so, what is it?” This chapter addresses the effects of Job’s suffering, both on the three friends who witnessed it (and, unwittingly in the office of the Satan, equally unwittingly *caused* it!) and on Job himself.

8.1 The Effect on Job’s Friends

8.1.1 Priest after the Order of Melchizedek

Early in the drama we see Job’s habitual behavior as a priest for his family:

His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom. (1:4-5)

Exactly what state of covenant relationship this particular Gentile experienced with the God of Israel, or what Job understood as the duties of a priest, are issues of endless debate amongst the scholarly doctors (which, Chesterton cheekily remarked, “is the business of doctors to do”²¹⁰). The two critically important points are that Job acts in the spiritual service of others and that it is his regular custom; it’s behavior which is a

²¹⁰ G. K. Chesterton, “Introduction to the Book of Job,” 1916, Cecil Palmer and Hayward, London, UK, ix

natural expression of his character. He is a man regularly dedicated to atoning for loved ones.

One notes an immediate parallel:

“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives”
(Luke 22:39)

It was Jesus’ regular custom to go to the Mount of Olives to pray. The majority of prayers Jesus offered were for other people, which I find a constant exhortation to my own conduct. Those who offer their lives in the constant service of others are those who enable themselves to be employed by God as priests.

We might object that the Bible teaches a priest must be descended from Levi, the third son of Israel (Numbers 18). This was only true for the Levitical priesthood; there is a higher priesthood, the spiritual order; the order of Melchizedek, which requires no particular bloodline ancestry. Melchizedek was simultaneously the King of Jerusalem, Yahweh’s chosen city, and a priest before God (Genesis 14:18). Melchizedek’s signature feature was that his genealogy was deliberately obscured from the scriptural record, so that he appears out of the blue. A man from nowhere, as if specially created by God. The writer to the Hebrews eloquently explains:

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. (Hebrews 7:1-3)

Melchizedek’s feature of appearing to have no parentage sets the tone for the members of his priesthood. Ultimately the

great High Priest of the spiritual order, Jesus of Nazareth, qualifies perfectly. Jesus literally had no human father and, furthermore, he was the embodiment of the Word of God, which literally has neither beginning of days nor end of life.

The Hebrews passage unlocks an ancient mystery of the Joban tale concerning Job's missing genealogy. Job is permanently listed without a genealogy. And what highlights the missing family line is the fact that the opposing friends in the book are *invariably* listed with their heritage appended: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite. *Never once* is Job attributed a family genealogy and *never once* are any of the three friends listed without theirs. (Elihu the Buzite's heritage is only occasionally listed.) This reveals Job as a potential member of the order of Melchizedek, by emphasizing the 'without father, without mother' theme.

Balchin assists by suggesting the name Job could mean: "no father" or "where is my father?" This would be the icing on the cake of this line of thought, although I am unable to find a Hebrew source text or dictionary which ratifies these interpretations. Balchin logically theorizes that this meaning ties in with the absent genealogy for Job, but tragically sees no value in the line of thinking, concluding: "Lack of data is not important"²¹¹ and thus failing to spot the Melchizedek motif.

Other factors contribute towards the scripture's presentation of Job as a man with no origin. The authorship and date of the book are not certainly known; and while that is not unique for scriptural texts, it testifies to the same theme. This supports not only Job's office within the Melchizedek priesthood, but also helps reveal Job as a man representing a universal human problem, which Ragaz noted.²¹²

Surprisingly, even the numbers of Job's flocks and herds may be supporting this same Melchizedek theme. The divine

²¹¹ J. Balchin, "Sitting with Job," 1998, Rhoswiell Books, Oswestry, UK, 5

²¹² L. Ragaz, "The Bible: An Interpretation," 1950, in N. N. Glatzer, "The Dimensions of Job," 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 128

hand in authorship of the drama tells us the precise number of his children and animals:

Job had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. (1:2-3)

Each of the numbered groups is based on a three, a five or a seven. Each is a prime number, indeed all of the prime numbers in the range from three to nine.²¹³ Prime numbers can be understood as numerical ‘Melchizedeks’ because they cannot be broken down into more basic factors from which they originated.²¹⁴ This may simply be stretching a point, but it is interesting to observe.

All these facts: Job’s listing without a genealogy; the contrasting perpetual citation of the genealogies of the three friends; the uncertain date and authorship of the book; and the prime numbers associated with Job’s possessions; combine to suggest that Job is a priest after the order of Melchizedek: without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life. If this is true, we should anticipate Job acting in the role of priest in the drama by performing an act of atonement for the people.

8.1.2 The Suffering of a Righteous Man

Priests of the order of Melchizedek also exhibit the feature of learning through suffering.

²¹³ For interest’s sake, the probability of picking six numbers between three and nine and hitting all the primes, yet only primes, is ~0.1%. The probability of hitting each of the available prime numbers twice each, as the scriptural record does, is more than 1 000 times less likely still.

²¹⁴ For example the number eight is not a prime number because it can be broken into integer factors of two and four; which multiply together to make eight. By definition, this isn’t true for a prime number. Prime numbers, such as characterize all of Job’s possessions, are essentially numbers ‘without father or mother’ in this way.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

(Hebrews 5:7-10)

These words are spoken about Jesus, which is fascinating. Jesus *learned* obedience. Therefore, although it sounds very odd, it is not accurate to say that Jesus was always obedient from birth! This is not to imply that Jesus was in any way *disobedient*, because he was not, as the same author has just specified (Hebrews 4:15). But it shows he gradually grew in obedience as he learned more about His Father. So we may need to upgrade our understanding of what obedience is; it's much more than 'not doing anything wrong.' That's a very inadequate understanding of obedience, to relegate it to being the absence of a negative thing: a form of double-negative. Obedience, therefore, is best understood as enacting God's will, or reflecting God's character. Thus God's will and character first have to be comprehended, a process which naturally takes years, even for His son Jesus. In this way we can comfortably understand Jesus having to *learn* obedience, without any implication that he was ever disobedient.

But why does there have to be suffering on the priest's road to obedience? God does not enjoy seeing people suffer:

Though [God] brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.

For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to the children of men.

(Lamentations 3:32-33)

Primarily, following God's will causes us suffering simply because it's not natural for us to obey God. Self-denial isn't easy, nor will it always draw respect from one's peers. Fadelle expresses this articulately:

“[Jesus] *learned obedience* through what he *suffered* shows that Jesus did not automatically do his Father's will – he had to choose to obey. Making the right choice every time brought suffering. He suffered when he said ‘no’ to the natural self. He suffered from the hostile reaction of others.”²¹⁵

One of the priest's principal duties was to bear the burden of the people; literally carrying the animal carcass from the gate of the Tabernacle to the altar (Leviticus 1). (Their other principal duty was to communicate God's wisdom to the people, Malachi 2:7.) It entailed the professional dissection and dismemberment of various calves, goats, sheep and the like, in preparation for the ritual sacrifices. The sacrifices were designed to provoke the people to appreciate the consequences of sinful actions. The ‘suffering’ of the priest comprised taxing physical labor as the sacrifice was prepared.

In the order of Melchizedek, the spiritual priesthood, I believe all this is played out on the spiritual plane. The duties of the Melchizedek priest are the same: to represent God to the people and to bear the burdens of those looking to atone. But these burdens are now spiritual burdens, which perhaps answers our question why there has to be suffering en route to this elevated priesthood. Suffering is a natural consequence of sin. This is important: we identify the source of suffering as sin, not God. Nor do we foolishly advance this conclusion in the context of the doctrine of exact retribution, where each sinner suffers only for his own sins and in direct proportion to the magnitude

²¹⁵ N. G. Fadelle, “Getting it Right with Jesus,” 2009, Williamsburg Christadelphian Foundation, Bloomington, IL, USA, 71

of his sin. Far from it! The conclusion here suggests the priest bears the principal burden of the sin. How true that is in the story of Job! Job was blameless: a righteous man. He was also a man accustomed to focusing on the atonement of others, a man who volunteered himself in the service of those he loved. God saw that He could afflict Job to draw out of the three friends their self-righteous pride in a distilled and flagrant form, where He could judge it, destroy it and thereby save them. Other commentators have also noted that the suffering of the innocent may operate beneficially in the salvation of the guilty,²¹⁶ and parallels between Job and Jesus can be found in the literature as early as the fourth century.²¹⁷

This allows us to appreciate that God is not bullying Job, because the suffering arises from the situations and attitudes of the three friends, not because God needs or wants it.

Jesus exhibits the same behavior as God in this (as he does in all matters: John 5:19). Just as any quality teacher, we see Jesus too deliberately stretching a star pupil for the general benefit of the witnessing class. For example, he meets a Syrophenician woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 15:21-28). Jesus apparently twice rebuffs her plea to heal her daughter, finally saying, in reference to her alien status: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." When she counters: "Yes, Lord... but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table," he remarks: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted" and her daughter is healed. I once heard a sermon in England which suggested that Jesus had simply lost focus and the woman set him straight. I was gravely disappointed by such ham-fisted exposition. Jesus is the embodied Word whose compassion exceeded any! I am convinced Jesus knew from the outset he was dealing with a powerful disciple and so deliberately drew the best out of her for

²¹⁶ H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament," 1913, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 245

²¹⁷ Zeno, "Tract. 11, 15," 4th Century AD, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 109

the benefit of those surrounding. To use a cricketing analogy, I believe Jesus deliberately bowled the woman a short ball because he knew she'd hammer it clean out of the ground over midwicket and thus teach those present a thing or two about how to bat. Jesus is not bullying her, or mistreating her, any more than God is bullying Job. I have no doubt Jesus is delighted by her, just as God delighted in his servant Job, and Jesus well knew how to employ her strong faith both to glorify the Father and educate the other disciples witnessing her depth of faith.

God plays a direct hand with Job's friends too. The salvation the three friends receive comes because God forgives them. Ironically, He could have treated them according to their own doctrine of retribution and destroyed them as they deserved. Instead, God says to Eliphaz the Temanite:

“So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.”
(42:8)

Amidst the wrath: forgiveness. Atkinson comments: “It is hard to forgive Eliphaz his unjust tirade,”²¹⁸ yet that's precisely what God does. The same God who is spoken of so poorly because of what happens in the book of Job is actually the first to forgive the three friends, whom most expositors are very reluctant to forgive! He forgives the very sources of the Satan, the ones who are responsible for the calamity that came upon Job. Truly this is a loving God, to the point of forgiving even those we struggle to, so there is irony upon irony in this most remarkable drama.

Thus the bottom line in this thread of the drama is this: The suffering of a righteous man brought salvation to

²¹⁸ D. Atkinson, “The Message of Job,” 1991, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, UK, 50

unrighteous men. In this statement alone we see both a profitable reason for that suffering and also a foreshadowing of the Christ. How well Job typifies the Messiah; and what a tantalizing message of salvation this promotes! For if the suffering of one righteous man can bring salvation to three of his friends, how much more can the suffering of The Righteous Man bring the whole world's redemption?

8.2 The Effect on Job

8.2.1 From Fear to Faith

We have noted a couple of times that God is also working to refine and elevate Job's own discipleship. Here we explore explicitly how Job's discipleship changes. Right from the start we are told that Job is righteous and blameless; in the opening verse of the drama. He is presented as a man in whom is no sin (necessarily an idealization of reality, but relevant for the drama). But equally early on we learn the *motivation* for Job's blameless life. He serves God from fear. We can see this fear in his opening statement:

Early in the morning [Job] would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of [his children], thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. (1:5)

What was it Job feared? Job himself tells us: he feared destruction from God if he sinned. Pollock also noticed that Job's piety was "largely influenced by motives of fear" and he offered sacrifices for his children from an "overscrupulous conscience."²¹⁹ When destruction arrived, Job confessed openly that he always feared that it might; and he was heartbroken when

²¹⁹ S. Pollock, "Stubborn Soil," 1946, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 270

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it did because he had supposed that blameless service could keep calamity at bay.

“What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.” (3:25)

Later he goes on to list, in poignant appeal, the explicit details of his blameless life and, once again, reveals that the reason he kept himself pure was from *fear of God destroying him if he did not*. For example:

“I made a covenant with my eyes
not to look lustfully at a girl.
...if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
knowing that I had influence in court,
then let my arm fall from the shoulder,
let it be broken off at the joint.
For I dreaded destruction from God,
and for fear of his splendor I could not do such
things.” (31:1,21-23)

By saying that Job served God out of fear, we are implying that his knowledge of God’s loving nature was incomplete. This is entirely concordant with the broader message of scripture: that we are all in need of a closer communion. Job was praised for being blameless and upright, but as the twelfth century Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides observes, Job’s *knowledge* is not described as having been perfect.²²⁰

Is service to God out of fear appropriate? On the simplest level the answer is ‘yes,’ but the scriptures are clear it isn’t the best one can do. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7), so it is even a good start. The Satan certainly had no fear of God at all, and he was left a long way

²²⁰ M. Maimonides, “The Guide of the Perplexed,” 12th Century AD, English translation, 1963, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 21

from wisdom or godliness in his (their) conduct. That said, serving God from fear is certainly not the endpoint of the relationship with God that the disciple should be seeking to attain. Nor is it a very enjoyable way to experience life in the present (although it has value if it is a means to redirect a destructive life into a productive one).

Job's inherent fear as the basis of his discipleship affected his fine service as a priest, too. We saw from the quote above that he offered sacrifices for his children selflessly, but out of fear. This contrasts sharply with the prayers of intercession offered by the Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek who was to come:

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours... My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:9-26)

Jesus, like Job, offers prayers for those about whom he cares. But Jesus offers the prayers out of love; and so that those who desire to atone can also share the Father's love. Jesus does not pray because he is terrified of God's awesome power destroying either himself or the ones for whom he prays.

So God finds a solution for Job, who is stuck in the mode of serving God out of fear. He brings the very destruction of

which Job is terrified. It still looks like a bit of a brutal solution, if I'm perfectly honest, though that's doubtless because I only 'see a poor reflection,' rather than there being any clumsiness on the part of our Father. By bringing the very destruction on Job that Job always feared would come if he disobeyed, even though he has *not* disobeyed, God teaches that fearful, blameless service is not ultimately the discipleship He seeks from us. God cannot be controlled by blameless service. He cannot be controlled at all. But he does love His children. If Job is prepared to *trust* that God will do what is right for his development at every stage, and provide for him the various undeserved gifts characteristic of the spontaneous behavior of a loving parent, he can learn to love his Father as well as relax and enjoy his discipleship, without in any way compromising his piety.

This has always been God's intention, that the fear of the Lord, the beginning of knowledge, should blossom into the mature state of a communion centered around love; where that love can be reflected both upwards toward Heaven and outwards in service to those fellow children of the Lord.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16-18)

Love elicits trust. We are able to bear times of suffering because we trust the One who loves us is not visiting upon us malicious wounding, or even randomized or profitless pain. Trust is essential for such a relationship to function. I think of how a small child can wholeheartedly abandon himself to sleep while his father drives the car, even while his mother may nervously remonstrate with the father's driving. Of course in those human

cases the trust may be misplaced, because humans are unreliable. But if we believe that our Heavenly Father is truly, totally reliable in His loving care, then we are assured our trust in Him is never misplaced.

I believe Job realized all this through the revelation of God's second speech: God's graphic depiction of the Satanic enemy of human pride. This then was the work God performed with Job. Using exactly the same mechanism He used to bring salvation to the three friends: namely the intense suffering applied to Job, he brings Job from a service of fear to one of faith: a victory in Job's own discipleship.

8.2.2 Repentance of Dust and Ashes

When Job saw how he had been employed as a priest in the salvation of his friends and been purged of his infection of Satan – the pride with which his friends had assaulted him – he would have felt a tremendous release. The suffering through which he had persevered suddenly had a reason, a fantastic reason! It served the ultimate good cause for one who dedicated his life to the spiritual service of others: the salvation of loved ones. More importantly, Job realized that God was working actively through his suffering, which meant that the source of his most intense pain, his perceived separation from his God, was mistaken. God had actually never left his side. This provoked his expression:

“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.
You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.’
My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes.” (42:3-6)

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How did Job ‘see’ God? Maybe the statement is merely hyperbole for Job describing a new and closer experience of the Almighty. Job has seen his promotion in the priesthood from the physical order of sacrificing animals for his children to the spiritual order of Melchizedek. He has seen how highly God values him in being utilized as a conduit for God’s salvation to eradicate the sin of pride from his friends, albeit which sin exacts a monstrous personal cost. But is there more in Job’s statement? We’ll reflect on that later.

We noted previously that the closing statement – that Job despised himself and repented in dust and ashes – is in stark contrast with the suggestion of Job feeling joyful, grateful and relieved. The quote sounds like a man beaten into submission by a Powerful God rather than released by a Loving One.

Let’s remind ourselves of the context. First, ‘dust and ashes’ is where Job is sitting:

Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. (2:8)

So to ‘repent in dust and ashes’ is an absurdity: Job is already sitting there!

Job also intimated *why* he was sitting in the ashes:

“[God] throws me into the mud,
and I am reduced to dust and ashes.” (30:19)

I suggest this is not, unfortunately, the humility of a man recognizing his mortal state before his Creator. Job is not saying that he has *always been* dust and ashes. This is the slightly embittered statement of a man saying: “Look what God’s done to me! He’s ruined me!” To use a modern metaphor, Job is saying: “God has *trashed* my life. He now treats me like garbage. So I guess on the garbage heap is where I belong!” His very presence

on the ashes pile, I suggest, is Job's silently angry, enacted complaint of God's injustice and cruelty.

And then he sees God hasn't been cruel to him at all. God has, through his intense suffering, saved the three friends he always loved. What a revelation! Job has been highly honored to be a chosen vessel employed in God's eternal plan of salvation. Yet he has been sitting on the ashes pile to demonstrate how much God doesn't care for him. So amidst the joy and relief, he has to feel a little foolish.

But how does that square with the apparently continuing lament: "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"?

The apparent contradiction hinges around just one word: the preposition "in" (dust and ashes). Amazingly, this word isn't in the Hebrew: prepositions are only *inferred*, which is why Hebrew is such a notoriously difficult language to translate. The original verse has only four words [ma'ac, nacham, 'aphar, 'epher]: "despise, repent, dust, ashes." All else has to be inferred by the forms in which the verbs appear.

Gutierrez proposes an excellent solution,²²¹ based on the work of Patrick,²²² which results in the reading: "I despise and repent *of* dust and ashes." This has two significant departures from the common translation. First, Job is not stating that he despises *himself* (although he doubtless felt foolish that he had railed against the God who had employed him so powerfully) so there is no longer a demoralizing tone to his argument.²²³ The second departure, of great magnitude for appreciation of the drama, is that Job is saying he repents *of* dust and ashes! This has

²²¹ G. Gutierrez, "On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent," 1987, Orbis, New York, NY, USA, 86

²²² D. Patrick, "The Translation of Job XLII, 6," 1976, *Vetus Testamentum*, Germantown, NY, USA, 26

²²³ Other commentators have also recognized that the verb 'despise' [Hebrew: ma'ac] is not listed with an object: N. C. Habel, "The Book of Job: A Commentary," 1985, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 576

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massive impact on Job's appreciation of God's work in his life! Job can now be seen to be saying:

“I have seen God first hand! I was never abandoned! I was completely wrong about being made dust and ashes by God. I should never have seated myself on this ashes pile and I'm leaving immediately!”
(42:5-6, my paraphrase)

By contrast Balchin suggests any revelation of God is a debilitating experience which drives us *to* dust and ashes, not beyond them: “[Job] returns to his mound of dust and ashes. This is what the privilege of seeing God does for a man: to keep the vision he must recant in dust and ashes.”²²⁴

I wholeheartedly disagree! Instead I see Job saying: “I repent *of* dust and ashes,” and I find that beautiful. It resolves the contradiction between the relieved happiness we anticipated Job to feel from God saving him from Leviathan and the traditional rendering of the text portraying him as disconsolate. Best of all, it confounds the notion that God was only interested in demonstrating that “He was number One,” which is tragically all that some expositors are able to see in His speeches. God is not so insecure that He needed to prove to Job, Satan, or anyone else that He controls the world! God's primary interest is the salvation of any and all who are willing to be His children, and a constant improvement in the closeness of the relationship they share with Him. No wonder Job abandons dust and ashes! At that moment, I am convinced he got up from the ashes pile and, even though he was as yet unhealed from his physical ailments, limped away with lightened heart, never to seat himself there again.

²²⁴ J. Balchin, *Ibid*, 112

8.3 Foreshadowing of Messiah

8.3.1 The Promise of Messiah from God's Speeches

From as early as the Garden of Eden mankind was promised redemption. God made a promise – to one later described as Satan, no less! – that One would come who would destroy him. That victor would be the seed of the woman, and therefore a human man, yet he would pay a price of suffering to achieve that victory.

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15)

The New Testament teaches Jesus of Nazareth was the ‘Seed of the Woman,’ the Messiah who destroyed the Beast.

Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The book of Job adds two relevant revelations:

- Even a righteous man cannot defeat the Satan
- The Satan can be defeated only by the Word of God

Thus the book of Job plays a vital part in teaching us who Jesus is. When we see Jesus defeat the Satan in the Wilderness (Matt 4; Luke 4) his victory doesn't stem from the fact he is a righteous man. The book of Job teaches us, via the consistency of

scripture, that Jesus' victory occurs because he is the Word of God.²²⁵

Even without reading the beautiful presentation of Jesus as the embodied Word of God in John's Gospel, God's speeches in Job enable us to anticipate this already. Indeed the speeches *insist* upon it. How satisfying it is to be able to see the scriptures weaving together these strands of revelation into one powerful message. And this in no way detracts from the impact of the revelation via John when it arrives, that those blessed to live in the first century truly saw the Word of God appear to them in physical form:

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:9-14)

The differences between Jesus and Job are as sobering as the similarities. Jesus successfully fought off the wiles of the Satan where Job did not. But let's not miss the dramatic differences in their ultimate mortal fortunes. Jesus was the "Job" who never received the temporal blessing of restoration in his mortal life. Jesus was burdened with the weaknesses of

²²⁵ Jesus continues to defeat the Satan after the Wilderness struggle also: shunning his powerful resurgence in Gethsemane (Luke 22), killing him in his own death on the cross (Luke 23) and completing the victory (for the battle is merely tied if both finish destroyed) in exiting the tomb in glorious immortality (Luke 24).

uncertainty and doubt that plague every human mind, yet he was never blessed with the restoration in which his human nature could take courage. This underscores what a truly remarkable man Jesus was! And it also has an intriguing implication for all those who would follow him. Since Jesus had everything taken from him, we cannot follow a ‘winner’ or a ‘successful man’ in any human sense of the word. This is a beautiful, subtle rejection of the clamorous and greedy world of man.

8.3.2 Temptation in the Wilderness

Job, the righteous man, has been tempted in the wilderness by Satan. For those familiar with their scriptures, this blatantly foreshadows a coming act of Messiah. Consider:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

Jesus’ experience	The Joban setting and story
led by the Spirit	The LORD replied, “...not one of the men... who disobeyed me... will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers... turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert” (Numbers 14:20-25)
into the desert	<u>In the land of Uz</u> there lived a man whose name was Job. (1:1)
to be tempted by the devil	The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands” (1:12)

Table 8_1: Comparison of the settings of Jesus’ and Job’s Temptations in the Wilderness.

Consider the comparison of the gospel quote and the events we have unwrapped in Job’s story (Table 8_1). In each case God directs a journey into the wilderness, resulting in a time of testing and revelation. As a result, we can extrapolate *backwards* to see what Jesus may have learned from the example of Job and,

perhaps more importantly, we can extrapolate *forwards* from the examples of both men to learn how we should be responding to the same combative assaults in our lives.

This foreshadowing supplies a further, fascinating reason why these events should have befallen Job. The Joban tale now acts as a future textbook for Jesus! ²²⁶ – a textbook for the essential part of Jesus’ life of resisting Satan; both the Satan without and the Satan within. Jesus *learned* obedience (Hebrews 5:8), which means he had sources from which to learn, and doubtless the scriptural scrolls he knew so well were a principal source of that education, along with prayer and direct revelation. So when we turn to the account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, we can be primed to look for what he may have learned from the suffering of the righteous man who went before: Job.

Jesus endured three signature temptations, reminiscent of Job’s triune Satan. Some might be prompted to try and validate a one-to-one mapping between each of Job’s friends and each of Jesus’ temptations, but I do not believe that works. But I think there is value in comparing the responses Jesus gave to his three temptations, to the responses Job gave after each of his three rounds of attack (Table 8_2).

There are principal points to notice, both from Jesus’ statements per se and how they compare with Job’s responses.

- 1 Then the devil left [Jesus], and angels came and attended him. (Matthew 4:11)

Jesus prevails! Even though we do not see the fullness of his victory until much later, in fact strictly speaking we will only see the fullness of his victory in the Kingdom of God, we do see Jesus resist the spirit of self-indulgence – *the* Satan – at this time. God’s speeches to Job taught us that only the Word of God can

²²⁶ I am grateful to Norm Fadelle for provoking my thoughts in this direction.

tame this Beast; therefore in seeing Jesus' victory in the wilderness temptations, we see he is the Word of God.

Jesus' response to his three rounds of temptation	Job's response to his three rounds of temptation
"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4 quoting Deuteronomy 8:3)	"Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God?" (9:2)
"It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:7 quoting Deuteronomy 6:16)	"But come on, all of you, try again! I will not find a wise man among you." (17:10)
"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:10 quoting Deuteronomy 6:13)	"I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live." (27:6)

Table 8_2: Comparison of the responses of Jesus and Job to their Temptations in the Wilderness.

2 Jesus restricts his comments solely to quotes from the Word of God. Jesus was a highly intelligent and articulate man, always able to outmaneuver even the cunningly planned sophistry of the contemporary intellects of the day: the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees (e.g. Mark 12:13-17;18-27). Yet in this test he resorts only to quoting scripture. I suggest he is demonstrating his understanding that the Beast within, proud human willfulness, can only be tamed by the Word; and arguably he has learned this from his reflections on the Joban tale. Jesus shows he has obediently responded to the divine injunction: "Have you considered my servant Job?"

3 Jesus' three quotes come from the book of Deuteronomy. We established earlier that Deuteronomy is coincident with the time of Job! This strengthens the idea that the book of Job was on the Master's mind during the wilderness temptation. That said, the book of Deuteronomy is also simply the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, whether or not it coincides with Job, so the simple comparison between the two wilderness wanderings, Israel's and Christ's, could be the dominant influence on Christ's replies.

4 The replies of Jesus and Job, to Satan, are similar in the first response, (Table 8_2) but thereafter they diverge. This is the most reliable indicator of where Job began to fail, the point where his behavior differs from the Lord's. (These comments are not designed to belittle Job, however. Naturally we all fall short when compared with the Lord!) The critical distinction comes in the contrast between Job's second response and the second and third responses of Jesus. Job deliberately draws Satan towards him; Jesus pushes him away. Job is riled and, buoyed with the knowledge that Satan's arguments are vain, he's keen for combat. "Come on, all of you, try again!" he cries, knowing he has the beating of their reasoning, but dangerously blind to the infection of their pride. Jesus, knowing the nature of the Beast far better and I suggest, educated by his careful reflection on Job's stumble, refuses to engage Satan. "Away from me!" his only comment.

James later concludes:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

5 Job, because he engaged the Satan, was driven to a point where he was compelled to speak of his own integrity: "my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live." By contrast, Jesus, who shunned the Satan, concluded: "Worship the Lord

your God, and serve him only.” Having remained unentangled from Leviathan, Jesus was free to speak well of his God.

8.4 Restoration

8.4.1 Did Job Succeed or Fail?

This is not a simple question and anyone could be forgiven for being unclear on this point.

On the one hand, the drama began with a barter between Satan and God. God had backed Job to succeed in a certain matter, the Satan had proudly assumed he knew better than God. This would seem to be all we need to know to answer whether Job succeeded or failed, for if Job failed then God was wrong. So Job evidently succeeded where God said he would.

But on the other hand: haven't we just said Jesus succeeded where Job failed? Fourth century Christian expositor Chrysostom is convinced Job succeeded in resisting Satan where Adam did not.²²⁷ Martin Luther explicitly disagrees, saying Job “talks in his human weakness too much against God, and thus sins amid his sufferings.”²²⁸ I concur with Luther: where would be the need for Jesus, if Job has gone before? Furthermore: if Job succeeded against the Satan, why does God upbraid him as one who darkened counsel with words without knowledge? How could God have saved Job from the jaws of proud Leviathan if Job resisted the Beast? God had already specifically said that if Job could overcome human pride then God Himself was unnecessary as Savior (40:11-14). Thus Job evidently failed to overcome the Satan.

So did Job succeed or fail? The resolution is simple: we must recognize there are two distinct battles going on.

²²⁷ J. Chrysostom in “A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,” in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 25

²²⁸ M. Luther, “Works of Martin Luther,” 1932, VI, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 382

- Battle 1: The Satan versus God. The Satan asserted that Job would curse God if his personal circumstances were adversely affected. (In analyses of the book, this is commonly referred to as ‘the barter.’) God knew otherwise. Job’s persevering faith proved God the winner of the barter.
- Battle 2: The Satan versus Job. The Pride of Man confronted Job with specious accusations. Though Job was able to confidently dismiss the false accusations, his accurate perception of his innocence and insistence on maintaining the debate derailed him into the ditch of pride himself, from which the Word of God later saved him. God restored Job’s humble mindset by revealing to him the nature of the Beast against whom he had been in combat, and by whom he had been defeated/infected. Later the Word of God made flesh – Jesus – prevailed in the same battle, where even the righteous man Job had failed.

In both cases God’s Word is the only winner. It also makes sense that there are two battles. Since the Satan is the opponent of God then, by its very nature, it had to attack both God and His faithful servant. Yet, such is the nature of God that His victory is experienced as blessing by all those involved. Even those who hosted the Satan were brought to a position of salvation through the work of the priest Job, and Job himself is elevated to a position where he can serve God without using fear as his primary motivation.

8.4.2 The Promise of Resurrection

At the end of the matter, righteous Job is blessed.

After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. (42:10)

Job really was a righteous man, and in the end he receives great material wealth. Ironically, where the suffering of Job causes many readers to be angry at God, the ending of the tale seems to perplex and disappoint expositors just as much! Gutierrez morosely concludes: “the ending evidently displays a certain naivety,”²²⁹ while Weiss goes further to suggest: “the story ends... with an inadequate attempt by God to make amends to Job by making him wealthy and respected once again, and by endowing him with a new set of children.”²³⁰ Worse yet, since righteous Job is rewarded, does this ending demonstrate that the doctrine of retribution was right all along? After all, the good guy finished with all the toys!

The doctrine of retribution is not justified by the ending of the Joban drama. The whole thrust of the narrative has demonstrated that the suffering and destruction brought upon Job had nothing to do with any wickedness on Job’s part. Nor does this blessing contradict that, because Job receives this great blessing at the very moment he has just been delivered from the jaws of sin, after repenting from his pridefully issued subpoena against the Almighty. In fact, belief in the doctrine of retribution is the only thing preventing us from speaking well of God, because it insists God *must* reward Job for being faithful and thus it prevents us from seeing God’s blessing as gratuitous.

Is Job’s blessing completely random, then? Again no, but its causal link is to the goodness of the *Father*, not the goodness of His faithful servant. Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God made flesh, revealed that it gives God pleasure to give gifts to His children, as even any human parent likely understands.

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good

²²⁹ G. Gutierrez, *Ibid*, 12

²³⁰ P. Weiss, “God, Job and Evil,” 1948, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 184-185

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gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

(Matthew 7:10-11)

The early parts of God’s speeches to Job revealed, via the imagery of wild animals, that God alone is in control and that He is unconstrained. The three friends had argued that since Job was suffering, and *since God was predictably bound* to punish sinners with suffering, Job must have sinned. The Bible identifies their mis-speaking of God as their primary misdeed (42:7). Now that we have seen Job blessed, we must take care not to stumble the same way they did at the very last! We risk invoking the bizarre situation where we attempt to force a mandate upon God that, in order to preserve our concept of disinterested religion, He is *not allowed* to bless Job for his persevering faith; but can only distribute material rewards to those who don’t want them. The fact that the doctrine of retribution is false *does not constrain God* from blessing His faithful servants as and when He chooses. And he chooses to do so here, in which we can all rejoice.

Looking closely at the nature of the blessing, the scripture tells us Job received a ‘double portion’ of all he had before. This mirrors a practice of the Mosaic Law where the firstborn son received a double share of the inheritance relative to all other parties.

If we can briefly pause for a fascinating aside, God decreed that the ‘double portion’ must not be removed from the son of a wife who is ‘hated’ and given in preference to the son of another wife who is favored:

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is

indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.

(Deuteronomy 21:15-17, KJV)

These verses have an extra poignancy when we remember that the name 'Job' means 'hated.' A caveat: Job's name [Hebrew: Iyowb] is a different word from the one translated 'hated' in Deuteronomy [Hebrew: Sa'na], but the concept is the same. Job was the 'hated' son – not hated of God, as we have seen, but despised by prideful Satan. Once again Deuteronomy's text, contemporary to the life of Job, has especial resonance to the Joban tale, revealing that the 'hated' son should not lose his double portion.

Table 8_3 indicates the simple arithmetic of Job's apparent 'double portion.'

	Job's 'double portion' blessing (42:12-13)	Job's initial quantity (1:2-3)
Sheep	14 000	7 000
Camels	6 000	3 000
Yoke (pairs) of oxen	1 000	500
Donkeys	1 000	500
Sons	7	7
Daughters	3	3

Table 8_3: The arithmetic of Job's double-portion blessing.

An obvious contradiction stares us in the face. When it comes to sons and daughters, the treasures Job will doubtless value more than anything, the double-portion appears to have fallen short. Job has not received twice as many sons and daughters as he enjoyed before. Why not? Would God short-

change his beloved servant, especially in the blessing which is most valuable?

The subtle beauty of what God is doing here is profound. Only one explanation is possible, if we dismiss the spurious notion that God has cheated Job. The only way Job can have fourteen sons and six daughters, the ‘double portion,’ is if the original ten children can, in some way, be considered to be alive. I’m not suggesting they somehow survived the collapse of the house, that simply contradicts the text: for sure they are mortally dead, alas. But they are alive, though dead, in a way in which the deceased animals are not. I believe God is giving Job assurance that the children are ‘alive to Him,’ that they have hope in a life after death. God is communicating the hope of the resurrection to Job!

Some expositors argue that Job has already professed an understanding of the resurrection in his comments concerning the Redeemer (19:25-27). I concluded Job’s consistent reference to death being a state from which man cannot return (7:9-10; 14:7-10; 17:15-16) overrides, since those quotes allow no realistic room for alternative interpretation. This makes God’s actions in the epilogue all the more beautiful, as I believe we get to witness Job’s first illumination of resurrection and everlasting life! We’ve already considered how much relief and joy Job felt when he saw how he had been employed as a priest in the salvation of his friends. But how much more joy will he feel when he sees that his children will live again!

It also now makes sense why the numbers of Job’s flocks and herds were detailed in the prologue (1:3). We could be forgiven for thinking: “Why would I possibly need to know Job had 3 000 sheep? What a pointless verse!” as we launch into the drama. But without that fact we would have been unable to deduce God’s promise to Job of the resurrection of his children.

It is also valuable to consider the timescale over which Job’s realization of the promise of resurrection to his children

would have come about.²³¹ I presume that at the moment of his restoration, Job didn't know he would only father ten more children, (unless this was specifically announced by God, which it is not recorded as being). It would only have been as the years passed, and perhaps the window of human fertility drew closed, that he would realize he would not father twenty more children, but only ten. Over this time, as his wife bears these ten children, however long that would have been, the realization would have gently and beautifully blossomed concerning what God was therefore promising for his earlier children. I can only imagine how slowly this realization would have developed and thus, by the same token, how deeply it would have imprinted into the heart and mind of both Job and his wife.

Job is not the only human in history who has suffered the intense and unique pain of losing all of his children. But he is perhaps the only human in history to receive the assurance that *all* his original children are secured a place in the coming Kingdom of God!²³² And he receives this message in such a characteristically divine way, via the subtle play of the numbers of flocks, herds and children with which he is blessed; a message medium so gentle it will not even be noticed by any but the most careful listener. But Job is such a careful listener to God's words, as we have seen. This is a unique and amazing promise given to a unique and amazing man. Most importantly of all, it enables us to speak well of God, as it powerfully illustrates the unfailing love our Father willingly displays towards His children.

In fact another subtle hint at Job's double portion may be seen in his resulting life length.²³³ We know Job lives 140 years after the experiences of the tale itself and we know that at the start of the drama he has ten children. This suggests a total life length of 200 years or more. We have chronologically placed him

²³¹ I am grateful to Jessica Miller for provoking my thoughts in this direction.

²³² This rebuffs the theory that Job's children are evil and that the ritual feasting they enjoyed together (1:4) was debauched activity, which view is sometimes aired.

²³³ I am grateful to Keren Robertson for this suggestion.

at the time of Moses, who lived to the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). This means that Job likely received a ‘double-portion’ even of life itself.

8.5 Reflection

We remember how the drama began. God started it. Not Satan. It was God who provoked Satan to consider Job (1:8), not the other way around. And now, at this late stage in the analysis, we are well set to appreciate exactly *what* God was starting.

I recall an episode involving a school-friend of mine, when we were both nine, who went around the school playground challenging everyone to arm-wrestling matches. He was a good kid, no bully; it was just that he had recently obtained some newly developed strength and proficiency at arm-wrestling and so was delighted to tour the playground encouraging anyone of our school year to compete. He generally won, obviously, else I presume he’d have stopped issuing the challenges; such is the nature of nine-year old boys after all (and perhaps some older ones, too!). This kept him entertained for many days that summer term, I recall. There’s a certain degree of immaturity and self-promotion at work, obviously; arguably combined with a certain degree of insecurity. Yet as long as its contained to nine-year-olds arm-wrestling in the schoolyard, it’s all pretty harmless.

But the problem is this. Is the book of Job teaching me that God is the same? That He is no more mature than a braggadocio nine-year-old? After all, God can confidently challenge Satan in order to prove him wrong, because His divine omniscience guarantees Him full knowledge concerning Job’s true character. So is the Joban drama showing me no more than the Almighty wandering around the celestial playground issuing intellectual arm-wrestling challenges He knows He can’t lose? Is this my God?

If I'm under the impression that God performs all this to demonstrate Satan's error, presumably the answer has to be 'yes,' unfortunately, for under those circumstances the only thing resulting from the barter between God and Satan is God's victory – which God knew He would secure.

But understanding the three friends who ended up being saved *as* the embodiments of the Satan, I see a God whom I can speak well of very easily. No wonder God *initiated* this interaction with Satan – He was concerned with saving lives, even of those opposing Him! That's *what* my God goes around provoking: Salvation. My God is indeed an awesome God.

And why Job? Of all the people around at that time, what did God see in Job that selected him as the man whom He would select for this service? Although the ways of God will always be inscrutable to us, we can make educated guesses from what the Word of God shows us. Job was a man dedicated to atoning for others and that is the type of man God uses in the salvation of others. I'm not saying God *needs* this type of person, for clearly God doesn't need anything from us, as Paul eloquently articulated at the Areopagus (Acts 17:24-25). But just as the miracle of the feeding of the 5 000 was based on the five loaves and two small fish that Andrew brought to the Master (John 6:9), so it seems it is God's pleasure to use the tiny, ineffectual offerings that we can muster up in our service, through which to perform His will.

This challenges me: Am I that man? Do I regularly dedicate my life to seeking the spiritual atonement of others? Is it true, for example, that the majority of my prayers are actually on behalf of other people, rather than focused on my own needs and desires? If so, I am the type of person God is seeking to operate in the ongoing order of the spiritual priesthood. And if not, what am I going to do about that?

Job was that type of man. Each day he sacrificed for those he loved. His shortcoming was in failing to disengage from the Satan so that the Word of God, not him, could judge the pride of his friends. He was determined to persist in the fight

with Satan to demonstrate his own rectitude. Again, the Joban tale provides excellent education. Don't pick a fight with Satan. When personal attacks are launched by pride-filled opponents, don't go round after round in protracted debate. Ultimately those middle chapters in Job do have a sense of futility to them (as well as a progression teaching us of the nature of the Satan) and that futility communicates a valuable lesson! Even if we are convinced we have the beating of Satan's reasoning on an intellectual level, the infection of the pride that drives the attacker is the truest danger, as Job was to discover empirically.

I'm convinced this is how Jesus knew he should rebuff the Satan in the wilderness and, just as with Job, I think it's vital to identify who Jesus' Satan was. I am convinced that the Satan in Jesus' wilderness temptation was Jesus' own self-will, his prideful desire to serve self not God. In other words, Jesus was tempted by the same Satan we meet in Job. It makes sense Jesus would be attacked by the same Satan, because the opponent of God must also be the opponent of the Christ, since the Christ is the perfect expression of the Father (John 10:30, Colossians 1:15). In fact I do not believe the scriptures can support any other interpretation for Jesus' Satan, although it is beyond our purview to establish that matter here.

We saw Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8) an early part of which was being "led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" – a picture beautifully resonant with Job's experiences in Uz. We might ask: Why is the Spirit of God leading people to be tempted? Didn't James assure us that God doesn't do that?

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

(James 1:13-14)

James tells us temptation comes from our own lusts, not God, yet the Gospel of Matthew seems to contradict, saying Jesus was led “of the Spirit” to be tempted.

I contend the Spirit did *not* cause Jesus to be tempted; rather the words in Matthew’s record need to be read very carefully. I suggest what the Spirit did was *solely* to lead Jesus into the wilderness. No more. The *temptation* came from Jesus’ own lust to sin; and doubtless it occurred at that specific time because, as the previous verse shows, Jesus had just received the Spirit of God without measure. (The chapter break between Matthew 3 and 4 is tremendously unhelpful as it breaks an important connection.) When Jesus received unlimited power: obviously temptation is bound to result! How could temptation not appear, and immediately at that?

It wasn’t the Spirit that caused Jesus to be tempted. The Spirit saw temptation was inevitably imminent and effectively said to Jesus: “You need to be alone now. The last thing you need is to be surrounded by people. They will distract your focus, exacerbate the temptations and, quite possibly, derail your resistance and contribute towards you actually sinning! You need to be led away into the desert, right now, so that the imminent temptation your human nature is causing takes place in an environment free from those additional pressures.” This is how I understand the verse: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” The temptation was triggered by Jesus being human and receiving unlimited power. The Spirit merely chose a wise location for the cataclysmic collision to occur.

This interpretation is consistent with James’ writing that God does not tempt us. It is also fully consistent with the central theme of our exposition of Job. God provokes salvation, not suffering, or temptation; even if the latter two may be inevitable pit-stops on the way to salvation, by reason of the weaknesses of either ourselves or others.

Jesus was coping with a purely internal Satan, as we do daily, so his example helps us resist Satan in our discipleships. Jesus knew that to give mental headroom to the things that tempted him, to let them lurk and fester in his mind, was disastrous. Only immediate banishment of the Satan's suggestions from his mind would keep him in harmony with his Father. This is a protocol Jesus adopts throughout his ministry: when tempted, he dismisses the temptation immediately and removes himself to a solitary place to pray: *just as the Spirit had guided him to do at the outset.*

For example, one of the temptations Jesus suffered in the wilderness was the temptation of power: the desire to rule the world immediately (Matthew 4:8-9), not waiting for the timing of his Father's plan to anoint him as King. He had received the necessary power to make this temptation come true (John 3:34), so the temptation from within was very real! We are also told that these temptations left him "for a season" (Luke 4:13, KJV) or "until an opportune time" (Ibid, NIV) – meaning they came back! And if we're sensitive to that comment, we can see one occasion when this temptation returns:

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (John 6:14-15)

We see the resurgence of the temptation for self-glory (the Satan) right there. Jesus, knowing that the people intended to make him king, was obviously tempted by this, because it's the same temptation he faced in the wilderness. Mindful of how the Spirit had led him before, he copies the Spirit's advice. He withdraws himself to a solitary place, to combat the temptation solely in the company of his Father, with no other distractions. The Gospel of Mark goes further, explaining how Jesus enacted

the “Away from me Satan!” portion of his response, by sending the crowd who were advocating this temptation away. In fact Jesus even takes time to perform his priestly duties first, by getting his disciples away from the crowd too, to protect them from the same temptation!

Looking carefully, we see Jesus’ response to temptation:

Immediately Jesus

[1] made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he

[2] dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he

[3] went up on a mountainside to pray.

(Mark 6:45-46, my inserted numbering)

Seeing a scene like this, of Jesus’ response to temptation, is strangely comforting. It assures me that Jesus really was a man like me, afflicted by temptations that he needed to resist – even run away from! The Son of God also needed to flee temptations! How much more important is it for a lesser disciple like me to give no mental headroom to the things that perennially threaten to draw me away from my Father. The world teaches “look but don’t touch” is a ‘safe’ and ‘morally legal’ strategy. Yet the book of Job, from which I believe the Lord also drew education at the time of his wilderness trials, strongly refutes this. The book of Job teaches that to give mental space to temptations, just to *engage* with Satan, guarantees disaster. The bottom line is: Don’t toy with sin. Don’t dabble at the divide of acceptable behavior. Don’t live life on the cusp of disaster. We know we will continue to sin, alas, and can survive only through God’s grace. But let’s not abuse and blaspheme the grace of God by positioning our discipleship’s walk *right on the precipitous edge* of what we believe to be acceptable, pushing every boundary to the maximum, living in the most morally dangerous way, so that collapsing into the crevasse of sin occurs a hundred times more frequently than if we

had followed the Spirit's lead and pushed temptation as far away as possible.

Jesus never sinned, yet we've learned this is not sufficient to define obedience. If I were asked: "In what ways am I obedient to God's will?" I might reply: "I don't murder, I don't commit adultery, I don't steal; therefore I'm obedient to God." Clearly a much different answer is needed, because that's not what's at the heart of the concept of obedience at all. The concept of obedience is centered on actively facilitating the will of God, not avoiding violations of His commands.

I find it very encouraging to think about obedience this way. All too often 'obedience' is projected as a self-righteous maintenance of a sin-free lifestyle. I personally recall when I was eleven, the school Headmaster, in school assemblies, intoning the need for obedience – an obedience I was unfortunately poor in maintaining, but perhaps simply because the 'prize,' of obedience, as it was then described, wasn't that appealing. It was always expressed in a negative way: obedience is *not* breaking the rules, *not* doing bad things. But this Biblical understanding of obedience is completely different! This is the 'obedience' based on positive action, including the cunning exploitations of opportunities to serve the God I already love. Obedience is designing new preaching courses that can still spark interest in a self-fascinated, ADD society. Obedience is pitching in at ground level to help the poor; even just playing with toys with an orphaned child. Obedience is combining resources thinly spread across the globe into a coordinated preaching, pastoral or praise effort. How refreshing! Now I'm excited about the prospect of being obedient, because I can utilize and refine my skillsets in achieving it. It challenges me in ways in which I am excited to respond.

Returning to the drama, we see Job was led by the Spirit to salvation, saved from the wilderness temptation of Leviathan, the Satan of human pride. That rescue prompted Job to claim that he had now seen God. We considered earlier that Job's statement may just be hyperbole for meaning he had elevated his

experience of God to a higher level, which was certainly true. But he seems explicit: he claims that while his ears had heard God previously, now *his eyes have seen God*. What does Job mean?

We can speculate: What is God? One scripture defines His constituent form as “spirit” (John 4:24) and the same author also offers the definition: “God is love.” I believe this latter definition proves very useful in understanding Job’s comment. The context of that verse is also helpful:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him... God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.
(1 John 4:7-9,16)

John describes how the unencapsulated Being of God is projected onto the planes of existence we experience. It’s loving behavior. This is what Job saw, and I believe this is what he is saying. Job had seen God’s speech saving him from his own pride, even while he railed at God. He had seen God’s justice bring salvation even to those drawn into the role of Satan. He had seen how much he had been valued in being chosen as the conduit of that salvation, as his suffering brought the means by which his friends’ pride was exposed and excised. Job had seen the literal outworkings of God’s love before his very eyes. And therefore, he had seen God.

We can speculate additionally²³⁴ that this is what Jesus meant when he said:

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20)

²³⁴ I am grateful to John Launchbury for this suggestion.

Did Jesus mean that every time two or more disciples assembled he was going to appear between them in some spiritual or metaphorical way? Possibly. But perhaps what he meant was that two or three disciples meeting together in his name (a phrase I presume meaning that the motivation of their meeting is discipleship driven) would be able to, in some small way, *recreate* his presence between them. Those that meet in his name should interact solely in a loving way, both internally within the group and externally to others. In that way they too evidence the works of love, by which the disciples of Jesus are known (John 13:35) and therefore by which the presence of Jesus is created. In other words, when disciples meet together in love, Jesus is *seen* as that love.

This idea is strengthened by two observations:

- Jesus' prayer to God on the night before his crucifixion: "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:26). This shows that Jesus equates *love* being in his disciples with *himself* being in his disciples.
- The context of the quote above from Matthew 18 concerns what happens when brethren don't get along. Jesus is encouraging all of us to *interact* with a great deal more gentleness, mercy and love than we might otherwise be disposed to do. When that happens, we too can see Jesus amongst us.

By seeing God's love (i.e. God) Job's whole relationship with Him was transformed, from a service motivated by fear to one motivated by faith.

I can only imagine how God must have viewed this discipleship progression from righteous Job. Initially Job was serving God because he was terrified that if he put a foot out of line he would immediately be crushed by a Mighty Blow from Above. What a tragedy! Job was stuck in this mode, quite unable

to move up to the higher level of a service of love towards his Father, and communion in love with Him. I sense God must have been observing His blameless servant with some sadness. As Job crept around trying to do everything right for fear of calamity pouncing upon him like a huge, hidden predator, God could only mourn from above: “Job! You’re my dear son whom I love. Why are you serving Me this way? This is no way to live!”

Consider the corollary. What parent wants their child to be obedient to them solely out of naked terror that they will be soundly thrashed if they do not say and do what is right? Is that any decent parent’s dream? Would not any loving parent feel utter sadness if they were viewed as a nothing more than an exacting overseer by the child for whom they would gladly sacrifice everything? Even if the resulting obedience of the child were ‘perfect’ it would ironically contain the significant imperfection of imputing that the parent is without a significant sense of love or mercy in their character.

Thus we have to know who our God is if we’re to have any meaningful relationship with Him. In fact, the scripture defines “knowing God” as the very essence of eternal life.

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
(John 17:3)

This verse fascinates me, because I believe the statement cuts both ways. It is eternal life to know God. Therefore, the very fact that we *don’t* live eternally proves we *don’t* know God. Why is it valuable to see the reversible logic in that instance? Because it changes the entire driving motivation towards salvation! The ultimate promise of salvation, then, is not to live eternally. Living eternally is the *consequence* of the promise. The ultimate promise of salvation is to know God.

And the more I know God, the more I am enabled to speak well of Him.

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“Have you considered my servant Job?”

Job 2:3

Chapter 9

To Speak Well of God

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The book of Job is delightfully small in plot: just three characters and the all-too-revealing interactions deriving from their inherent natures. The characters are:

- God (not counting his armor-bearer Elihu as a separate character, which is appropriate), whose inherent nature is Life.
- The Satan, Leviathan, human pride, the second most powerful force in the universe, who is in essential opposition to God. He appears in the triumvirate form of the three friends of Job; (yet it is also true to say that the three friends are victims of Leviathan as much as they are unwitting promulgators of him).
- Job, the Righteous Man, who attempted to wrestle with the Satan to defend his God; and through whose intense suffering God was able to free the three friends trapped in their own pride.

What is now tremendously attractive is the *simplicity* of the whole drama. God directs events to display to us the three fundamental forces in the spiritual universe: God; Good; and Evil. (Here I use ‘Good’ to mean obedience to God and ‘Evil’ to mean rebellion to Him.) God proceeds to show how each of these fundamental components interacts with the others.

Since there are only three characters in the spiritual universe, there are only four potential interactions, active interfaces, in that universe. I don’t wish to digress into the mathematical but in general, for any three-component system A B & C, there are four potential interactions: A-B; B-C; A-C and the triplet A-B-C. In our case, that translates to the interfaces between: God & Evil; Good & Evil; God & Good; and all three together. The drama of Job, with superb simplicity, steps through

these combinations in sequence and in so doing reveals the inherent nature of each interaction and each player (Figure 9_1).

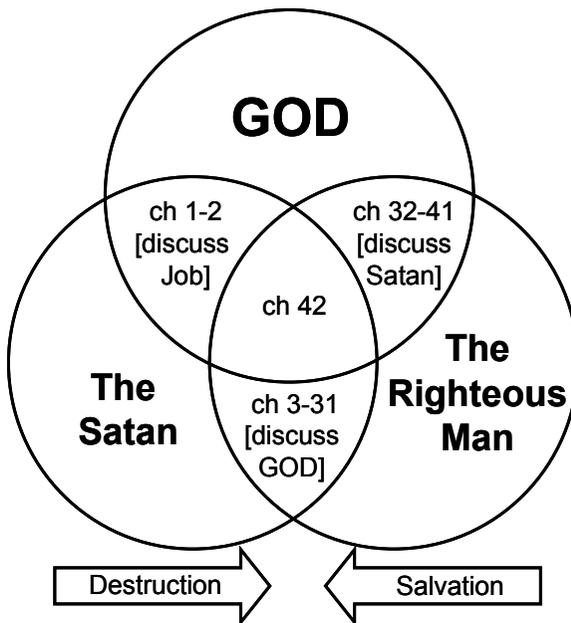


Figure 9_1: The book of Job: all characters and interfaces. The subject of conversation at each interface is shown in square brackets and is, interestingly, always the third party.

Per Figure 9_1, we can summarize the book:

- In the Prologue (ch 1-2), God interacts with the Satan. The subject is how the Righteous Man, Job, behaves.
- In the Debate (ch 3-31), the Satan interacts with the Righteous Man. The subject is how God behaves.
- In the Intervention (ch 32-41), God interacts with the Righteous Man (initially through one sent before to straighten the way and then directly). The subject is how the Satan behaves.²³⁵

²³⁵ The symmetry here offers further support to the notion that the climactic feature of God's speeches, Leviathan, is equivalent to the Satan: because each

- In the Epilogue (ch 42), all three parties collide together and the conclusion of the matter is revealed. God speaks concerning all three parties. The Righteous Man speaks concerning God and himself. The Satan is left with nothing to say. I suspect it will also be this way at the ultimate conclusion, at the end of days.

As further symmetry, God empowers both the Satan and the righteous man to have an effect in each other's life (Figure 9_1).²³⁶ In the prologue, God empowers the Satan to affect the life of Job and the Satan, being Satan, can only act destructively. His self-centered jealousies operate to destroy Job's life as much as he is (they are) able. In the epilogue, God empowers the righteous man to affect Satan's life. God can confidently announce that the righteous man will act to bring salvation, even to the ones responsible for afflicting him; because it is the inherent nature of the righteous to reflect God and therefore propagate salvation. There is symmetry upon symmetry, yet all within an elegantly simple integrity, in this remarkable book.

This structure reveals the book of Job as the classic education of wisdom: listing simply and completely all the parties and relevant interactions in the spiritual world, so that a profound and complete understanding of the spiritual universe can be attained by the attentive reader. Overriding the plotline of interactions is the theme itself: "theology." The words that a man, whether he is in opposition to God or in resonance with Him, (i.e. whether he is satanic or righteous), will speak about his God.

It also teaches us that we are guaranteed to have an effect upon the universe, every moment we are alive. Every moment we

time two parties dialogue in Job the subject of their dialogue is the third party. Moreover, I didn't notice any of the symmetries shown in Figure 9_1 until after I had finished my study, which means that even though my appreciation of these symmetries is considerable, it played no role in my developing the theory of their existence.

²³⁶ I am grateful to Keren Robertson for this suggestion.

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are filled with pride, our influence is spiritually destructive on those with whom we interact. Conversely, every moment we are resonant with God, our words and behavior have a saving influence. The book of Job suggests there's no possibility of sitting passively on the fence; we're constantly either generating effects towards salvation or destruction.

Whence then Job's suffering? Ironically, it was a consequence of sin, just as the three friends had said all along. But not his sin, as they had supposed: theirs. Their intractable pride kept them from union with their God. But because God loved them, and saw the persevering faith of His servant Job, He devised a plan by which their pride would be brought into such sharp relief that they would be able at last to recognize their error, repent and find grace. And what an immense degree of suffering Job had to bear for this to come to fruition! Such is the degree of damage human pride inflicts upon the world. Yet now we can see the true source of the suffering – human pride – God is justified even as Job suffers. This is a huge revelation, because it relieves us from the need to be defensive concerning God's conduct.

Through it all, the righteous man spoke that which was right about his God, which God affirmed (42:8).

Spongberg comments on God's vindication of Job:

“Hence we learn the importance of being right. Sound doctrine is vital!” ²³⁷

While Spongberg's commendation to the vitality of doctrinal rectitude can indeed be scripturally supported (e.g. 1 Timothy 4:16), I do not believe this is the point the book is trying to achieve. The point of Job's account is not to speak well of *ourselves* when we speak well of God; to pat ourselves on the back perchance we should accurately perceive, or more likely *receive*, knowledge of some divine construct of the universe. The

²³⁷ E. M. Spongberg, “The Book of Job,” 1965, private publication, 146

message of the book of wisdom is simpler than that, as wisdom often is. Observation of the universe provokes the wise to speak well of God, which Job did and for which the Father commends him.

By contrast, we revisit again our three highly regarded friends of the common era, who presumed to speak knowledgeably of the drama. Jung, who praises man above God: “The reason He doubts Job is because He projects His own unfaithfulness upon a scapegoat”;²³⁸ Murray, who sees God’s behavior towards Job as: “like torturing your faithful dog to see if you can make him bite you”;²³⁹ and Weiss, who supposes: “God, just to make a petulant point, proceeds to do almost everything the most villainous of beings could want.”²⁴⁰ God had worked His plan of salvation successfully: in Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite three more former emulations of the Satan were transformed by His grace. Yet all that arises from the Earth in response to this miraculous work are hate-filled epithets, the like of which we see above from Jung, Murray and Weiss. From whom do such comments come? The Satan, risen again! Those filled with the pride of their own supposed intelligence: ironically the identical mindset to the three friends God had, successfully, worked to save.

Most amazing of all, God *knows* that by working in this way He causes those who will only cast a cursory glance in His direction to be more likely repulsed by what they see, than enchanted; yet He works that way anyway. I find this is a common and deliberate methodology of God: He supplies a picture which, on the surface, will appear almost as the exact opposite of what it really is. Those who are opposed to Him will find adequate evidence to continue rejecting Him; just as those who dig deeply into an investigation of what is really happening

²³⁸ C. G. Jung, “Answer to Job,” 1952, in N. N. Glatzer, “The Dimensions of Job,” 1969, Schocken Books Inc., New York, NY, USA, 46

²³⁹ G. Murray, “Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy,” 1960, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 195

²⁴⁰ P. Weiss, “God, Job and Evil,” 1948, in N. N. Glatzer, *Ibid*, 183

will find the evidence that relays the beauty of the work in progress and thereby heighten their pleasure and strengthen their faith.²⁴¹ Jesus confirms this is how both he and the Father work:

“For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” (Matthew 25:29)

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”

(Matthew 13:13-15 quoting Isaiah 6:9-10)

The “they” in Jesus’ latter quote is necessarily those who are predisposed to disbelieve in a loving Father. Those who come to God, perhaps, not only with a view that they have a ‘right’ to life, but to have that life filled with (their concept of) blessings and, perchance even that is not enough, also an explanation, in terms they can understand, for every event in the world they perceive as unjust. With that disastrously unfortunate attitude, their interpretation of the book of Job must conclude that God is either uncaring or outright malicious. It is a true tragedy, but those who have closed off spiritual perception are sadly left in a very black darkness indeed (c.f. John 13:30).

²⁴¹ For example: the work of God in the life of Jephthah’s daughter, where God acts to repair families that men are foolishly tearing apart; and the Son’s cry from the cross: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” which careful study can show interprets as almost the exact opposite of what it appears. But these are both deep subjects for another day.

Through the years that God has worked this type of salvation, He has equally patiently borne the vitriol of those who professed themselves to be wise and castigated the very process of salvation He initiated. How fascinating that even their evil-speaking of God allows us to further speak well of Him! We are enabled to see His endless patience in bearing these attacks, in addition to the loving care He provides for those he seeks to save. This *is* an awesome God.

And He provoked all these revelations through a single question.

“Have you considered my servant Job?”

Finally, I can say that I have. I have considered this most excellent servant of the One who has no servants. I am enabled to see a Father who provides, even provokes, salvation wherever He works. Sometimes this work is straightforward and His loving nature is plainly apparent; and my theology remains unchallenged. Yet sometimes, as in the drama of Job, we are shown those most desperate paths to salvation, those paths where God reaches out even to those trapped in the deep-sea lair of the fiery, thrashing beast that is the near-indomitable Leviathan. No easy road to salvation this; and consequently the price exacted from the priest of the very highest, ancient order of Melchizedek is stiff indeed. But God had not underestimated the righteous man Job and He achieved the salvation He sought. God endured the centuries thereafter, with almost unending patience, those who spoke of Him viciously, precisely because He initiates this particular route to salvation, along with all the others, for us.

So, yes, I have considered God’s servant Job. And consequently, I am proud of my Father.

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Appendix: Comparison of Expositions

	Gutierrez	McGee	Atkinson	Baird	Balchin	Sargent	Spongberg	People
Central theme of book	To speak well of God even when poor suffer xviii	All men, even the righteous, need to repent, viii	To help cope with suffering in the world, 9	Perceive human vanity & God's righteousness 5*	Explore connections between sin & suffering, 20	Reveal a man's encounter with God 106	Problem of evil relative to God's righteousness iv	To speak well of God; He provokes salvation
When is Job?	<i>no comment</i>	Time of Jacob, viii	<i>no comment</i>	Between Abraham & Moses, 11	Before Moses, 5	<i>no comment</i>	Between Joseph & Moses, v	Moses, during wilderness wanderings
Who is the Satan?	Not specified, implies devil 3	Supernatural devil, 16	Angel who becomes the devil, 20	Anonymous human, 31	Obedient angel, 6	Anonymous humans, 103	Anonymous human, 5	Pride, embodied by the 3 friends
Does Satan vanish after chapter 2?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Who is the Redeemer? (19:25)	God, 65	Implies Jesus, 109	God, 93	God, 155-6	Job's life before God 186	God, 116	God, 59	Job's life before God

Table A_1; Part 1 of 4: Comparisons of seven expositions of Job with this one, illustrating key features of the analyses. Page numbers are marked for the opinions specified in the comparative expositions.

* This opinion is from Brian Luke, the author of the book's preface

	Gutierrez	McGee	Atkinson	Baird	Balchin	Sargent	Spongberg	People
Who stands upon the Earth? (19:25)	<i>no comment</i>	Implies Jesus, 109	Jesus, 94	Jesus, 157	unknown 187	<i>no comment</i>	Not sure, 60	Job restored by God
Did Job initially know resurrection?	<i>no comment</i>	Yes, 109	<i>no comment</i>	Yes, 155	No, 189	Yes, 116	Maybe, 60	No
Reason for 28 chs of debate?	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	Teach influence of the Satan
Nature of Elihu?	Pompous, but more intelligent than friends 44-8	Comes closer than the friends, 157, but also fails, vii	Self-important, pompous, adds nothing to debate 122-4	Not an upstart, important, but repetitive & bombastic 224-6	Worse than the friends 57	Failed as did the friends, 123	Type of Christ, the Mediator between Job and God, 104	Type of John the Baptist, who introduces God's Word
The point of Elihu?	Prepares us to hear God 47	Prepares the way for God 157	Introduces need for wisdom, 135	Prepares Job to hear God 262	<i>no comment</i>	Prepares the way for the Mediator 127	Emphasizes righteousness of God, not man, 106	Clears subpoena, prepares for God

Table A_1; Part 2 of 4: Comparisons of seven expositions of Job with this one, illustrating key features of the analyses. Page numbers are marked for the opinions specified in the comparative expositions.

	Gutierrez	McGee	Atkinson	Baird	Balchin	Sargent	Spongberg	Pople
Why no closure on Elithu?	<i>no comment</i>	He ran away when the storm broke 178	<i>no comment</i>	“no need” 219	Implies he was destroyed 62	Reconciliation unnecessary 134	Expects a mediator to be absent 104	Herald fades: “He must increase & I must decrease”
What are Behemoth & Leviathan?	Symbols of wickedness 80	Dinosaur & whale, 186	Hippo & crocodile 151	Hippo, 290 & crocodile representing pride, 293-4	Hippo & crocodile 101-2	Hippo & alligator; representing pride, 133	Hippo & crocodile, representing pride, 140-2	The Satan! Beasts representing Stubbornness & Pride
What is content of God’s answer?	Nothing can shackle God 72	Man can’t judge God 185	God amazes Job with tour of creation, 145-6	Tour of creation, 265, Leviathan is sinful pride 296	God is Supreme, 96-101; man must accept his lot, 120	Man can’t challenge God’s wisdom 133	Review of creation and pride, 127-42	God designs and cares, is untamed. Wild beasts introduce Beast of Pride
What is purpose of God’s answer?	Set Job’s mind free, 75	To make Job revile himself & repent 188	To distract Job from his pain, 147	Position Job so he is compelled to see God’s righteousness 284	Prove God’s supremacy over Job 103	Show God takes care of all, 133	Show only God combats sin, 143	1. Reveal Pride as Satan 2. Show God’s Word tames Satan 3. Save Job from pride

Table A_1; Part 3 of 4: Comparisons of seven expositions of Job with this one, illustrating key features of the analyses. Page numbers are marked for the opinions specified in the comparative expositions.

	Gutierrez	McGee	Atkinson	Baird	Balchin	Sargent	Spongberg	People
Why two beasts in the second speech?	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	Because first is physical and second more a metaphor 290-4	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	As dreams of Pharaoh: God would certainly judge Satan, and soon
How does Job feel after God's speeches?	Illuminated, submissive & joyful, 83-5	Sees himself as vile, sees he must trust God, 188	Humbled, submissive, contritely penitential 157	Humbled, deep feeling of sorrow 304	“Self-emptied,” returns to dust and ash pile, 112	Humbled 134	Reduced, stripped of independent thought, penitent, 143	Illuminated & joyful
Why only 10 new children?	<i>no comment</i>	Teach Job his children are in heaven, 190	<i>no comment</i>	Unsure, possibly to demonstrate resurrection 310	Mosaic law dictated double restitution only for livestock, 153	<i>no comment</i>	Teach Job resurrection 147	Teach Job joy of resurrection
Why does God make Job suffer?	Teach justice doesn't dictate how we speak of God, 87	No answer in Job; answers in New Testament 31	<i>no comment</i>	<i>no comment</i>	No answer, 116; We can't understand or expect to 106	Break down Job's pride 134	Demonstrate righteousness is most valuable thing, iv	1. Save those under Satan 2. Make Job's service from love, not fear

Table A_1; Part 4 of 4: Comparisons of seven expositions of Job with this one, illustrating key features of the analyses. Page numbers are marked for the opinions specified in the comparative expositions.