

A Battle for Righteousness



The Message of
the Book of Job

Prof. Dr. K.J. Popma

Translated by Jack Van Meggelen

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To my children, Katherine, James and Christine. Enjoy!

Bible versions used in this text:

ASV American Standard Version
JB Jerusalem Bible
KJV King James Version
NASB New American Standard Bible
NIV New international Version (not further identified in the text)
NKJV New King James Version
NV Nieuwe Vertaling
RSV Revised Standard Version

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Foreword from the Translator

The English translation of this book has come about because when I reread the original some years ago, I thought again and again, “I wish my kids could read this.” Soon the Holy Spirit's nudging to translate it so that they *could* read it became more and more real. With the advice and encouragement of many friends and relatives, this book is now reality. I believe that the importance of the content is still as acute today as it was 40 years ago, because the author deals with the ever-present realities of human sin and God's saving grace. The circumstances might change but the subject is as urgent now as it ever was, and Popma's ability to warn us when we might be tempted to listen to the siren song of our self-righteous hearts makes him a guide and teacher *extraordinaire*.

A few things need to be said about this translation. There were times and places where the original just would not make sense to today's reader in a different language and country. I have tried to be faithful to the content in such a way that this translation will be for today's reader what the original would have been for Popma's audience. I have tried to be true to the meaning because I want to serve the same Lord that I know Popma served rather than be a slave to the text. That does not mean that this is a paraphrase. Readers who have access to the original will find that the text is all there.

The original has almost no footnotes and none of the texts quoted from other Bible books were identified. I have given these texts, as well as other comments, in footnotes for easy reference. Throughout the book the NIV has been used for Bible references, except where noted with standard abbreviations for other versions. In a few cases I was not able to find any English version which reflected the meaning of the Dutch Bible translation or Popma's own insight. I have noted these occurrences in the footnotes. I have also provided a subheading for each chapter to indicate which chapter of Job is being discussed. Hopefully this will make it easier for referencing this text to the Bible.

The artwork on the cover is done by Matth Cupido of Canning, Nova Scotia and is part of

his Job exhibit at Redeemer College in October 1998. I am very grateful for his permission to use his work. There are a few people among the many friends who encouraged me, whose contributions have made this publication possible. I I would like to thank Dr. Wendy Helleman of Christian Studies International, currently teaching Philosophy at the Moscow State University, for her reading of the first draft and her detailed corrections and improvements to the text. Also Dr. Albert M. Wolters, Professor of Religion and Theology/classical Languages at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, for providing the details about the author as well as a critical reading of the text and offering many helpful suggestions to improve the final product. Both knew the original work, and had it available while they read this translation. Thanks are also due to my friends Wilma Bouma and Ary Vander Hoeven for their encouragement and faith in my ability to succeed. Last but not least, my wife, Martiny, who has read every page as it was produced, and who re-typed and edited the whole text as it was reworked, and my daughter, Kathy Russell, who has proofread the final text. This book could not have been completed if it were not for their help and suggestions, though I take complete responsibility' for the final text.

If any reader is encouraged to grow in understanding the Book of Job, and thus grow nearer to the God of Job, who revealed himself fully in Jesus, then my work is amply rewarded.

Jack Van Meggelen

Toronto, Ontario, 1998

About the Author

*Klaas Jan Popma was born in The Hague, The Netherlands, in 1903. He studied classical languages and received his doctorate in this field at the University of Leiden in 1931. From 1928 to 1955 he taught classical languages in a Gymnasium or classical high school, but this was combined in 1948 with an academic appointment in philosophy. At first in a part-time capacity but later full-time, he occupied the chair for Christian reformational philosophy at the universities of Groningen and Utrecht, from which he retired in 1973. He was a prolific writer; publishing not only in his primary fields of classics and philosophy, but also in theology and literary studies. His most extensive publication is the seven-volume work entitled *Levensbeschouwing*, a series of philosophical and theological reflections in the form of a commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. One of his greatest loves was the study and exposition of Scripture, which led to a wide range of popular and semi-popular publications. His study of the biblical writings was grounded in a solid knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, and was informed by a comprehensive grasp of Western intellectual and cultural history. His writings on the Bible are marked by exceptional originality, combined with a love for the reformed confessional tradition. He died in 1986.*

Introduction

The following studies based on the biblical account of Job, are written from a specific point of departure. This is entirely legitimate and needs no further comment. However, many misunderstandings continue to cloud this issue and lead to accusations regarding the lack of impartiality in biblical scholarship.

Two of these misunderstandings need individual attention. The first is the position that argues for exegesis without dogmatic presuppositions. Of course one can find examples of exegesis which are so greatly constrained by dogmatic perspective that one may well doubt the validity of its attempt to explain the Scriptures. To label any such explanatory effort as “dogmatically prejudiced exegesis”, however, is not warranted either. We must not confuse the effort to keep exegesis free from subservience to a particular dogmatic perspective or dogmatically-controlled approach, with the attempt to keep it free from any foundational dogma.

Much would already be gained by general acceptance of the important distinction between presuppositions which are necessary and those which have a negative function. An illustration of presuppositions with damaging consequences can be found in numerous exegetical studies which depend too heavily on a particular dogmatically controlled approach. A necessary presupposition, on the other hand, will not damage knowledge but assist it and even make it possible. We may use the term “dogma” for such a necessary and profitable presupposition. An example of such a presupposition may be found in the tenet that the Bible is the infallible Word of God in writing, for it provides a basic position that assists and even helps to increase our knowledge. The only way such a dogma can be eliminated is by replacing it with another dogma namely, with the presupposition that the Bible presents us with a haphazard collection of documents which have no coherence and form no unity whether as a group or individually. Such a presupposition is, however, characterized not by the assistance given but by the damage it does to our knowledge of Scripture.

The above positions may be regarded as extremes. They also appear in less blatant versions, and such versions are often not based on scholarly investigation. As a result many have concluded that scholarly investigation is sufficient in leading to the point of departure to be taken in Biblical studies. Acceptance of such a position, however, involves an error that can have very

serious consequences. For those involved are tempted to forget that any investigation itself already presupposes a dogma in the way it approaches Scripture. An example will help to clarify the point we are trying to make. The older “Staten” translation for Genesis 4:7b reads “...sin lies at the door,... but you shall rule over him.” The “Leidse” translation has “...you can rule over him”. An exegete of Reformed persuasion has rejected the “Leidse” translation and, rightly in my opinion, has referred to it as an example of “dogmatically prejudiced exegesis”. His reason is that the “Leidse” translation presents God himself as denying the teaching regarding human inability to do good. This may indeed have been the intent of the “Leidse” translation. Yet one cannot simply correct such a translation by positing that the text itself has another meaning. For the meaning of the text ‘itself’ cannot just be determined without first clarifying a dogmatic presupposition. This is clear from use of language such as the teaching regarding ‘human inability to do good’. Such language leaves room for only one of two alternatives: either one accepts the scriptural teaching regarding ‘human inability to do good’, or one rejects it. The authors of the ‘Leidse’ translation have apparently rejected it. But that is a dogmatic presupposition. The exegetes of Reformed persuasion would have accepted it, and that is also a dogmatic presupposition. But it is a helpful principle; one that will open the way to increased understanding and can, for that reason, be justified by investigation of the overall teaching of the Scriptures. For no particular pronouncement of Scripture can be interpreted in isolation from others. And inasmuch as the ‘Leidse’ presupposition cannot be justified when taken as part of the teachings of the Scriptures in their entirety, it will have to find its justification elsewhere.

This brings us to the second misunderstanding, one that involves the authority of so-called scholarly exegesis or exegetical technique. One can understand that scholars who have specialized in the languages and cultures of the ancient Near East will shudder at the conclusions of the ‘ordinary’ believers making naive use of Scripture. Yet even these learned specialists must allow their faith to guide them, and temper their annoyance. For the Scriptures are accessible to all, provided, of course, that this principle is not abused. And our experience tells us that many a highly qualified scholar of ancient Eastern languages and cultures has become guilty of gross abuse of Scripture through the practice of ‘exegetical technique’, while at the same time many a ‘naive’ reader of the Bible, by maintaining a living membership in the church of Jesus Christ, is capable of correct and fruitful use of Scripture even without technical, linguistic or cultural insight /knowledge. Much more can be said regarding the two types of misunderstanding just mentioned. One might distinguish different approaches to the Bible as follows: a Roman Catholic versus reformational approach; an orthodox versus a ‘critical-theological’ approach; a

Reformed versus a midden orthodox Evangelical approach. We could mention others. But in these distinctions we must note first, that all these approaches cannot possibly be accepted on an equal footing and, secondly that, without exception, these represent a religious motivation that can be expressed confessionally.

Proponents of these various approaches will readily concede that not all positions are equally acceptable. Those who advocate a 'critical-theological' reading of the Bible will consider the classical-reformational interpretation as illegitimate and even fight against it so vehemently that it will often be regarded as a narrow-minded and intolerant position. In recent years the reformational camp has become less militant but one may well ask whether this is a good sign.

It is remarkable, moreover, how few positive results have been produced by polemics regarding basic religious motivations which form the background and determine the varying approaches in reading the Scriptures. This leads us to question the rationale and the proper means of proceeding with such theological polemic. There is a direct connection between someone's reading of the Bible and theological point of departure. With both a basic religious motivation is expressed. One can therefore hardly expect that this basic motivation would also be brought to light with theological tools. To explain, let us take two previously indicated ideas of exegesis without dogmatic presuppositions and the idea of an exegetical technique presented as an impartial method. Although the two are related, there is also a noticeable difference. The latter is compatible with the former, but acceptance of an exegesis without dogmatic presuppositions appears also to be compatible with the view that interpretation of the Scriptures is to be limited by the Scriptures themselves; the latter, however, is ordinarily denied by those who overrate exegetical technique; they will go so far as to refer to this as 'dogmatic presupposition'.

The situation is even more confused because talented exegetes are frequently not much inclined to thorough self-critique. One may even find that they think the investigation will of itself determine the point of departure of the scholar, and thus an attitude of radical 'objectivity' is all that's required. Indeed, it will be very difficult to prove to such an 'objective' scholar that his position involves a thoroughgoing dogmatic subjectivity. On the other hand, we find those who accept a principal distinction between exegesis and confession and, in this case too, it is almost impossible to prove that such a distinction is of practical value. Acceptance of the teaching of Scripture, after all, immediately involves one in a confessional stance; without making choices of a confessional nature it is not even possible to read the Scriptures. Acceptance of the Scriptures demands active involvement, directing the will to listen and directing one's

attention to its sound and filtering out competing noises so that one's receptivity will be distorted as little as possible.

Evidence of uncritical attitudes can in part be explained by the natural inclination of these specialists; talent for languages and historical investigation are seldom found together with a more philosophical orientation. But that is not the most important thing. Acceptance of the idea of objectivity is in fact based on a principally determined choice, just as the position that one can practice exegesis without involving one's confession itself implies confession. Yet the question of one's inclination does play a role here, though it may not be the overriding factor. This is what complicates the matter and brings confusion; Furthermore, many positions are not meticulously maintained, and there are even cases where an exegete swings back and forth from one position to another without even being aware of it.

To give a completely satisfactory account of this issue, one would need a thorough investigation of the influence of religious schools of thought on linguistic and historical studies. Such an account would reveal that the most important decisions had already been taken before the days of Plato, that these were further refined in the period of classical Greek philosophy and shortly thereafter, and that from later antiquity, these have been combined with Scriptural thought patterns in an illegitimate synthesis.

Such a study is badly needed. It must be supported by persistent reading and a disciplined study of the Scriptures. Such a study can, after all, be undertaken only in the light of Scripture, if it is to have any chance of success.

It is indeed noteworthy and encouraging that analysis based on a responsible point of departure, when combined with study of Scripture reinforces a simple teaching, namely: that Scripture is to be read in a manner appropriate to Scripture; no use of exegetical technique can afford to ignore this. Such a teaching is supported by numerous well known expressions:

'We are to read the Bible as it presents itself' or 'as it ought to be read'. While these expressions remain somewhat vague, they do contain a kernel of truth. For, after all, readers who are altogether in harmony with what is read, by progressive, careful listening are able to hear with increasing purity. Bible reading is the foundation of daily repentance and the fruits of such may not be excluded in one's scholarly work.

This is the reason why, on the one hand, we must acknowledge that legitimate reading of the Scripture can not tolerate the idea of a *hermeneutica sacra* (sacred hermeneutics); for we read the Bible exactly like any other book, namely with a desire for an increasing degree of

harmony with what is read. On the other hand we must maintain, that Bible reading is different from reading other literature because the Scriptures are not comparable to the work of any human author. Thus, both a weak theologistic exegesis, namely one which overestimates the value of hermeneutics as a theological enterprise, as well as a rather humanistic method of exegesis are to be repudiated.

Whoever reads does so using both the soul and the eye. One cannot separate the two. But one may ask whether the eyes are spiritually healthy or at least longing to be healed. Then the soul, too, will do what the Lord expects of it, namely that, like a spiritual lamp it will search both the innermost heart and the outer public image of the self, and will, through persistent Bible reading become more and more sensitive to the point of departure needed for a full understanding of the Bible.

This means that the basic religious motivation, which energizes our exegesis, must be obtained from Scripture itself. Now one might be led to think that such a position implies that, in order to understand the Scripture, one must already know it. Of course that would not be possible. Learning to understand the Word of God involves repentance, and this is a movement, a struggle and a growth process. This movement we accomplish personally, provided that we understand the word 'personally' correctly. We are united with each other through relationships as persons; and in this way personal relationships serve our professional involvements and assignments. Accordingly, one could say that, because the Word of God is entrusted to the church, we learn to read the Bible in church. Nonetheless, ecclesiastical exegesis in accordance with the church's confession, has no more than delegated authority, as is revealed in the fact that this confession constantly looks back to the Scriptures and thus calls us back to exegesis. As a result, those who read the Bible are, on the one hand, bound by ecclesiastical confession but, on the other hand, possess a freedom in exegesis which goes well beyond the practice of exegesis within the space allotted by the confession. For it is, after all, the freedom of exegesis which makes confessing possible, allows it to be renewed and to be expanded in an uninterrupted historical process. One could certainly turn faithfulness to the confession into an idolatry, sidetracking the confession while appearing to give it a place of honour. With such confessionalism a living confession has been replaced by a lifeless image, thus closing the doors which allow contact with the God Who speaks to us.

The book of Job provides us with a study which will be most fruitful for clarifying the close relationship between the basic motivation of our exegesis and the reading of Scripture which depends on it. Because of the significant lapse of time between the history of the man Job

and the writing of the book of Job, this book presents us with a divine, authoritative message, covering a very large period of the Old Testament, revealing the unity of that period. Through its use of dialogue, the book also presents us with a wonderful 'drama' which faithfully reflects the dramatic character of human life and the lifespan of God's children on earth. Although Satan initially appears to dominate the scene from his dark, backstage role, God eliminates him from the actors when, at the end, He appears among the players yet without in any way losing the Majesty which puts Him far above the earthly life of human beings. The dialogues represent a series of encounters which lead to conflict and crisis, and serve to reveal the secret thoughts of many hearts. They also reveal the deliberations and basic motivations which lie at the root of the various types of exegesis. This gives the book of Job a wider appeal than many other Old Testament writings which are more limited by their close connection with the national life of God's people of Israel. The book of Job portrays the critical years of a man who was not an Israelite and who therefore did not know the limitations of the Israelites; yet his history was recorded by the cooperation of a group of people who, as Israelites themselves, did know those limitations very well. In this way the book served to herald a new day and a new time-period in which the national boundaries for the proclamation of God's Word would disappear. It is no wonder, therefore, that the book of Job often has a 'New Testament' ring to it even while it fully maintains the imperishable sense of Old Testament revelation. As a result, the reading and re-reading of the book of Job only serves to clarify that in this wonderful book one can find everything that the Law and the Gospel instruct and promise us in the Name of the Lord. (It should be understood that in so doing we make use of all available scholarly tools, as technical aids, however without granting any of them inherent religious authority.)

Numerous uncertainties regarding the book of Job appear as a sharp contrast to the sure conclusions about its message. There are doubts regarding its authors, regarding the history of the text before it has come down to us and regarding the order of various chapters or parts of chapters. There are doubts regarding the cultural environment of Job as a person and also regarding the methodology of the final authors. All this could be summarized under the heading: 'philological uncertainties'. Yet also note that these 'philological uncertainties' are closely related to religious uncertainties; philology cannot proceed without its own religious basis. It is folly to separate a philological from a religious stage in our study of the book of Job. Even the position that the book of Job has more than one author has a religious character and is the result of a religiously motivated point of departure. Speculation regarding the further history of the book is also based on religious motivation. Even proposals regarding the order of chapter and

verse are based on analytical critique which sooner or later will also reveal its credentials, namely its religious origin; in turn, it too is open to critical analysis regarding motivation and philosophical orientation. The Dutch Canisius translation goes so far in rearranging the traditional ordering of the book, that it is in danger of becoming irresponsible and arbitrary. If one does not see that there are good reasons why the third response of Zofar is missing, (easily discernible from Zofar's own role in the book), then one will do damage to the book of Job by supposing that this third speech must be hidden somewhere in the text. As for the cultural environment of Job as a person, that finally must also be sought primarily in the book itself. Thus we see that all the philological uncertainties have their own religious root; in a number of instances, if not in all, these uncertainties can be significantly reduced.

But we still are faced with one more uncertainty: What is the real message of the book of Job? On this question even those who have remained faithful to the Scriptures are greatly divided. One might even speak of the riddle of this book, keeping in mind that in accordance with the nature of such a riddle it may well remain partly insoluble.

All these problems do not, however, prevent us and have not prevented the present writer, even as a lay exegete, from working on a series of closely related reflections on this powerful book of the Bible. From numerous experiences he is aware that those who practice contemporary exegetical techniques with their impressive professional achievements, may well question his involvement in these issues. But he is encouraged by the thought that such a distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity' is untenable. Accordingly, he has chosen his own position from among the many current opinions and has dared to follow tracks which departed from the more common ones. He would like to thank all who have offered support.

The book has a twofold structure: in chapters I-V the order of the chapters in the book of Job has been followed as much as possible; in chapter VI the figures are reviewed one by one. The book of Job has enough depth to warrant such a double approach. Although repetition could not always be avoided, it was far less necessary than the author at first expected. And the repetitions which were necessary may well have some benefit by focussing attention on certain aspects of the discussion.

K.J.Popma

I. Turmoil Has Begun

1. Initial Reconnaissance

The book of Job brings us a message with divine authority, namely that mankind is to acknowledge and praise the Lord God in His sovereignty. This message comes from God Himself and has the authority of an order. Acknowledgement of God's sovereignty means that those who are bound to God by covenant are moved to praise him, because He does all that pleases Him.

There is something truly majestic in the Lord doing all that pleases Him; and the splendour of that majesty gives light to our world. As soon as we short-change this majestic sovereignty, our own sun becomes darkened and our human dignity is lost. Human beings, as creatures and children of the covenant find their human dignity in recognizing and praising the sovereignty of God. Whenever human beings who are covenanted to the Lord, neglect acknowledgement of God and His sovereign power, they come to grief. We need to praise the Lord for His omnipotence as much as we need to breathe and keep our heart beating. It is our health and glory to recognize that the Lord does ALL that pleases Him. Only when this recognition flourishes is our humanity visible and noticeable. Oppression and constraint take root wherever God's sovereignty is denied. And some of that oppression and constraint (indeed even more than a little) comes to haunt the Christian community as soon as the glorious proclamation of God's sovereignty receives impoverished, hesitant or reserved expression.

Hidden in the life of everyone who believes in Christ, there is something truly majestic. It belongs to the very core of their being. They are royal children. But they possess that Christian royal dignity only in as much as they acknowledge God's sovereignty with praise. There is no other source for living a life worthy of humanity.

* * *

Numerous attempts have been made to give a brief description of the major lines of development of the formation of churches within Christianity. Such brief surveys, however, often

give rise to objections; for instance, one may focus on the confession of the mystery of the Holy Spirit as the outstanding characteristic of the Greek-Orthodox churches, but this is only partially true. One can, likewise, take issue with those who label Lutheranism as a movement which asks only one question: How can I, sinner that I am, achieve salvation? Characterizing Calvinism as a movement which holds 'Soli Deo Gloria' as the core of its position, is nearer the mark. Yet even this rightly appreciated slogan can be further elaborated. For, when Calvinists make God's glory the centre of their thinking, they are in fact giving a radicalized acknowledgement of God's omnipotence.

A position summarized in this way represents an abbreviated confession. During the course of this work, we will be returning to the viewpoint which identifies the understanding of the Scriptures with confessing one's faith. In this introductory excursive we will simply assume its accuracy. For the God-glorifying acknowledgement of his omnipotence is, after all, a confession which can only be made as one finally returns to the Scriptures, and at the same time, allows one's understanding of Scripture to express itself as a confession. In so doing our exegesis will always be directed to the Word itself. Only with such guidelines will we do justice to the process of exegesis of the Scriptures, and bring it to completion. Our listening to the words of God and our attempt to understand them is at the same time perfect and tainted, '*simul iustus et peccator*'. Its shortcomings come from our tendency to stray as sinners while its perfection comes from our focus on the Eternal God through Whom we have salvation. Its shortcomings are based on our vain attempts to reach the goal, while its perfection rests in Christ's provision of that toward which we are striving.

Our exegesis, our listening, and attempts to understand the words of God, thus, involve us in an activity which takes us back and forth. On the one hand we develop our exegesis from the Word itself. But this involves us in a process of listening which, if it is obedient, results in an expansion of understanding the boundaries of life and heart or, again, focusses on the motivation of the heart in the most specific details of one's life.

Obedient listening to the authoritative message of the book of Job, must result in praise for God because *this God does all that pleases Him*. It is a worthy effort and adds to the worth of our lives. Compared with this, any other song is out of tune, any other life-style is out of shape. Whoever falls short of such a level of praise also falls short of his full human potential and worth.

In order to realize such an exegetical confession or confessional exegesis, we will approach the central issue of the message of Job by giving a brief introductory survey; note that we are focussing here not on the 'question' of the book but on the message, for the book does not

primarily present us with a question. Initially, we will ignore peripheral issues in order to focus on what is central. It goes without saying that we will eventually need to account for what has been set aside.

* * *

What, then, are the guidelines to be accepted and, progressively, to be given more definitive basis as an aid in the study of the book of Job? As a starting point, we may set aside the illusion that we are reading the book of Job for the first time; that is just not likely in our time and it makes no sense to adopt it as a hypothesis.

There are two passages in the book of Job which assure us of its indubitable message, namely: that human life lived in close communion with God, and in human dignity within the bond of the covenant has as its deepest meaning our great joy in knowing that the Lord does all that pleases Him. If we ever forget this, even for a moment, we sink to a level lower than what is appropriate for human life. We may well be rich, and glory in our proud possessions; we may even be the trendsetters of sophisticated cultural achievements; we may be sensitive, enabled, well-educated, people of understanding and refined tastes. Even so we feel the pressure and our heart cries out because we remain so far below the potential of human life, and we have not recognized or realized that which is truly worthy of our human existence. The two passages we mentioned can be found in Job 39:37b and 42:5. Some have taken 39:37b, 'I put my hand over my mouth', as an expression of the heart of the message. Apparently, there is even a commentary which has chosen this text for its title. But once we read Job 42:5, we know that such a title would prejudice the interpretation. Job said, 'I put my hand over my mouth' before he had seen the incomparable glory found in praising God's omnipotence. In response I might say that with 39:37b the authors of this wonderful book had not yet arrived at the heart of this message.

They reach it first with 42:5, 'My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you'. That is the true core of the message. Job had been an upright man all his life, he had suffered much grief and, even worse, had suffered at the hands of his comforters. When the Lord finally did speak to him from the storm, Job listened very carefully. Yet he was not able to perfect his understanding. He was not able to develop his exegesis to the point of achieving perfection. But he did recognize that he had to change his views from any that he had ever anticipated. He had been rescued from the devastating results of his train of thought. That was a blessing.

Because our own thoughts on disaster and suffering are weapons of the evil one. We can not always evade such thoughts but if we act on them they will surely lead to death. The suffering caused by our neighbour is, in the final analysis, an attempt at murder, even though there may be hundreds of excuses to justify his behaviour.

This brings us to the core of Job's suffering; for his neighbours and friends with all their 'wisdom' brought him to utter frustration and the brink of death. This is why the words of Job, found in 39:37b, although they are sometimes called, 'his first admission of guilt', actually reveal a new opening up, a refreshing and liberation of a life that was so nearly devoured by death. But it is only with the second confession in 42:5, that we find Job's true answer. Job compared his former life with the present reality. Of course, he had always been an upright man in the best sense of the word: upright, pious and turning away from evil. But now he had come to the climax of his acknowledgement and praise of his God. With pride and joy he exclaimed, 'I know that you can do all things, no plan of yours can be thwarted' (42:2).

This man had enough strength to be rich. That is seldom the case. Affluence can harden the heart and it is almost impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven no matter how many 'good deeds' he may perform; the deeds of mercy of the wealthy are often little more than feeding a selfish ego. But Job was both rich and able to maintain his humanity. In so doing, he takes a place above Solomon and, even, above Abraham. In Job's life of blessing even the beauty of his daughters finds a natural setting; they are called 'Little Dove', 'Cassia' and 'Little Horn of Oil'

'Geniessen macht gemein'.¹ It's true! But the saying loses its validity altogether in the life of those who praise their Lord, because *He does all that pleases Him*. These are the ones born and chosen to enjoy life; and they know how to do it. All the rest, even the very best among them, sink down into commonality if they dare to lay hold of joy. Hell will be full of pleasure seekers who were too small-minded to claim the joys of the life lived in fulness of praise.

¹ German for 'there is commonality in joy'

2. Guidelines for A Working Hypothesis

Like Ecclesiastes, Preacher and a number of Psalms, the book of Job belongs to books of ‘chokma’, the wisdom literature of ancient Israel. ‘Wisdom’ in this context is the religious knowledge which all human beings in their natural condition need in order to understand the law for religion. That law is summarized in the well-known words of our Saviour, ‘to love God above all and our neighbour as ourself’. The introduction to Calvin’s Institutes tells us that ‘virtually all wisdom has two aspects, the knowledge of God and that which pertains to ourselves’. This basic statement of Calvin’s teaching does not contradict the summary of the Law. But the latter does teach us that human beings, in their original condition, can only come to grips with themselves and their own existence through their neighbours. That is why anyone who ignores his neighbour and refuses to respond to him is guilty of active man-slaughter while, at the same time, also causing his own destruction.

We come to self-awareness mainly through the care of a mother, the guidance of a father, discussions with siblings and friends, as well as the wife whom the Lord Himself provides for us. ‘One man have I found among a thousand, but I did not find a woman among them’; that too is wisdom.² ‘The love of our brother Jonathan is more incredible than the love of a woman’;³ also comes from such insight and understanding.

This is why one cannot characterize the wisdom of ancient Israel as ‘practical’. It (wisdom) does not tolerate such a reduction. It promotes a world-view and divine teaching. While it is also practical it is above all religious in nature. It is wisdom.

Indeed there is still much we do not know about the way in which such wisdom was taught. There are a number of passages which indicate how such teaching was given and we may base our working hypotheses on them. In 1 Sam. 15:22 ff. we are told that Samuel gives Saul two proverbs: ‘...To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.’ The two proverbs belong to the very oldest of sources recorded in the Bible. They are different from any other examples and we may suspect a very concrete and close connection with everyday life. Samuel taught all his life. We may assume that as he taught, he would summarize his advice in pithy sayings and, as he crisscrossed-crossed the country in his capacity as judge, he would constantly reiterate these words of advice. In his old age he appears to have established a kind of colony

² Ecclesiastes 7:28b

³ 2 Samuel 1:26

near the town of Rama and this colony apparently included a school for prophets.⁴ One may well suspect that he presented his teaching by means of proverbs in the same way that he had done it earlier on his travels. Such a method of education must have developed over the years. That is what one would expect of such a scholarly community. These educational centres, probably started out with a focus on the knowledge of Scripture and Law, but as time went by, may well have acquired a different function such as becoming communities working cooperatively to write those books which could, in turn, serve as teaching aids. This gives us the origin of the collection of proverbs. The history of such a scholarly community is thought to have covered a number of centuries; the book of Ecclesiastes, which was apparently written shortly after the return from exile, presents us with the most recent work from the more ancient history of Israel. We know of a number of such books, written during the time between the return from exile and the time of Christ. Herman Ridderbos in his dissertation on ‘The significance of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’, has noted the influence of such proverbs on Jesus’ style of teaching.

The best way to understand such a school is to regard it as a team effort with styles of leadership which varied from one period to another. Although a type of petrification may have set in over time, when the books of Job and Ecclesiastes were written, there’s certainly no trace of it. Proverbs is known to have been written by different authors but, being a collection, consistent development of a thought pattern should not ordinarily be expected. With the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, however, one does find a more unified development of thought even with a plurality of authors. On occasion, Ecclesiastes does proceed by a series of theses and corrective antitheses, as in 3:12 and 13 with the opposites in vs 14 and 15; the connection between these sets is indicated by the initial ‘I have seen’ of vs 12 and 14. The structure of the book of Job is different, however, and we will now turn our attention to it.

In the book of Job a number of different and, mutually conflicting, viewpoints are presented by different persons. As a result, the structure of this book approximates that of a drama such as might be written for a radio audience. The characters include Job, his three friends and, finally, Elihu. But the content of this human dialogue is given by two conversations in which God Himself is one of the speakers. Of these the first dialogue is carried on by God and Satan. The second gives God’s answer from the storm. The first dialogue is completed with a narrative regarding the disasters that befell Job and the wealth he previously possessed; God’s answer from the storm is followed by a brief description of Job’s later riches.

⁴ See Samuel I on page 238 in the ‘Korte verklaring’, the Dutch ‘brief commentary’, a Bible commentary written by a large number of Dutch Protestant theologians. (Presently being translated by a

The significant aspect of the book's structure and, the matter on which our exegesis must be focussed, is the true unity which characterizes this book, a unity produced by the coherence of the school of thought out of which it arose, even if it was written by a number of authors, possibly even from different periods of time.

The dialogues between Job and his three friends were probably the product of a team of authors from one particular time period. The tone varies whenever a different friend begins to speak but Job's answers reveal a steady development of thought. The positions expressed by the friends differ one from the other. When Elihu makes his contribution, the book enters a new phase and one can certainly not exclude the possibility that this part of the book was produced later than the dialogues of the three friends. One may suspect that the narratives are also written by a different author but that is not necessarily true. One might even entertain the possibility of another author giving final editorial touches to the book as a whole; but that supposition would require the contribution of an unusually gifted editor, one, moreover, who almost certainly would have been an active member of the particular school of wisdom in which this book originated.

There is one more issue on which we must focus attention, one directly related to the question of the unifying focus of the members of the scholarly community. I am referring to the tradition which was preserved in that community, a tradition which may have been recorded first of all by this community. One may be quite certain that the life of the man Job dates back to ancient times; he may have been a contemporary of Abraham or lived shortly after him. But the book of Job as it has been handed down to us was written at least ten centuries later, possible even more. The book testifies to a righteous piety in an antiquity outside the life of Israel. The story of Job cannot have occurred much later than the death of Abraham for, with the descendants of Abraham, the revelation of God becomes largely limited to one people. That is why we must ask ourselves: 'How are we to understand a tradition which maintained itself for at least ten centuries, and only after that gave rise to the book of Job as we know it. It seems most plausible to attribute this to a *written* tradition. We now know that the schools of wisdom did have contacts with those of foreign countries; this is evident in Proverbs 30 and 31. It may well be that through such contacts a school, having discovered such a tradition concerning Job, would have pursued it and finally with much patient and difficult labour, have perfected it.

One must make a choice. On the one hand one may choose to accept the hypothesis of an old folk tale which has been passed on orally for many centuries and has finally been written down as the book of Job. In my view the preferred alternative is to accept a different hypothesis:

namely that the tradition regarding Job and his friends was preserved in written form outside Israel, collected through a particular school of wisdom and put together as a book by a team of scholars and scribes cooperating with such a unity of purpose that it is hard to imagine in the context of our highly individualized society. Such a hypothesis leaves little room for the possibility of poetic licence and arrangement.

3. The Prologue in Heaven – I

Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6 give dialogues of God with Satan. They provide the background for the narrative of Job. These are the only passages in the book where Satan makes an appearance. Job himself does not refer to him at all. One might conclude that Job himself never thought of attributing his troubles to Satan, but only those of much later generations came to such conclusions. If this is true, the opening discussions provide us with an explanation based on revelation that was missing in the received tradition. Job's own acquaintance with the working of Satan may have been limited to knowing that he tempts us to sin. And, on that score, Job's reputation was so high that his contemporaries could hardly believe it, and people of later centuries were long astonished by it. The translation of 1:8 gives the following: "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." But in the rest of the book there is no mention of Satan's influence. Job assumes that God is responsible for what happens to him. In this respect he is partially correct, particularly if we realize that Satan can not do anything without God's approval; he is a 'muzzled cur', as Abraham Kuyper⁵ once referred to him, and even recognizes God's omnipotence when he challenges the Lord, 'Stretch out your hand and touch his flesh and bones'(2:5). Consequently, Satan does receive permission to do his evil work.

Theological reflection within the church has time and again concerned itself with a deeper understanding of Satan. At times those providing leadership on this issue have denied his existence; this erroneous position come to a climax with the totally speculative view of Karl Barth who has attempted to present the power of the evil one as non-being, neither created nor uncreated. One may well ask whether any theologian is qualified to direct the church's confession in a particular direction. He certainly goes too far when he tries to introduce the congregation to foreign elements in the confession, as Barth has done with the theory of the non-

being of the evil one.

It may well be true that in demonology, pagan elements have been introduced from popular thinking regarding Satan. We may think of the view of the evil one as some kind of sovereign, opposing deity who, with his henchmen, somehow maintains his rule in spite of his losses, even though Scripture speaks clearly about ‘the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’⁶. Dante, among others writes of a continuing sovereignty of evil spirits, presenting a position contrary to that of the Scriptures, yet one that has made a deep impression on many Christians.

The book of Job presents Satan as a figure of great power, yet in need of God’s permission for everything he undertakes. The relation between Satan and the course of history is remarkable, for it is evident that Satan does not have a history of his own. The world of angels exists to serve the human world; fallen angels are simply unfaithful, rebellious and destructive servants for mankind. Like the faithful angels, their work too is focussed on the history of mankind; this is clear from Satan’s words in Job 1:7 and 2:2, where God calls him to account, ‘Where have you come from?’ Satan answered the Lord, ‘from roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.’

Satan’s interference in human history is a story of calamity. The world of evil spirits has indeed been allowed its ‘hour of darkness’.⁷ Over against that, Christ has given those who believe in Him full authority over the evil one and that makes Satan shudder.

What’s more, the kingdom of evil literally has to fight with the legions of angels who remain faithful. I am sure that the kingdom of darkness has a far greater influence in our lives than we usually suspect, for it maintains its unwavering attention focussed on those who are included in Christ and victimizes them with its intense and all-encompassing involvement. Yet they, in turn, may repeat after their Saviour, ‘... the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,...’⁸ At the same time we must realize that the evil one no longer has his title: ‘Prince of this world’, for John 12:31 tells us, ‘...now the Prince of this world will be driven out’. He, a ruler who has lost his throne because of the death of Christ, is to be thrown out of his territory, the world. John 16:11 reminds us that the Comforter will convict the world ‘in regard to

⁵ A Dutch theologian and later Prime Minister

⁶ Matthew 25:41

⁷ Cf. Luke 22:53

⁸ John 14:30

judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned'. Satan has vented his anger against Christ, and thereby assured his own death penalty, for he has been dethroned and his kingdom is finished. Period! (Regarding these passages on the Gospel of John, which may be found in the New translation by Dr. N.J. Hommes, see the notes)⁹ I recently discovered that even among many serious Bible scholars, Satan's loss of the title, 'Prince of this world' was not common knowledge. In this regard Dr. Holmes' notes are illuminating and helpful for those who know of them. For there are enormous implications for our world-view when we take Satan's loss of this title seriously.

Our view that the world of the spirits has no history of its own, does not mean that it is not involved in our world which is characterized by time. Even the recently mentioned Bible reference to 'the hour of darkness' of Luke 22:53, shows that this is true. The idea that the world of the spirits is disembodied can also be challenged for it reflects human wisdom rather than the position of the Scriptures. The way in which both angels and devils involve themselves with human events argue against the notion that they are disembodied creatures. Of course, we must also ask at this point how we are to understand embodiment. The view that angels, even fallen angels, have no material existence is not to be equated with the view that angels have a disembodied existence. But even the first view regarding immateriality may well be a bit presumptuous, for our experience of that which is 'material' may well be limited in a variety of ways. If we are to understand the Scriptures and particularly, if we are to understand the Prologue to the book of Job, it is important to remember that the world of the spirits can interact directly with the world of material existence. A connection between these is given in creation. With our hypotheses regarding immateriality and disembodiment we are in danger of cutting ourselves off unnecessarily from understanding the world of spirits in a way that is vital for our faith. Certainly Hebrews 1:7 gives us confidence to overcome such limitations of thought.

These reflections also make an impact on our view of human nature, because it represents the other important focus of the discussion regarding materiality and immateriality.

Once we obtain more clarity on the issue of human nature, we also gain more light on questions regarding the relationship between human and spiritual worlds. This may turn out to be much simpler than we often surmise. As long as our representations regarding these

⁹ Commentary on John 12:31, *Now*: this word, twice repeated, refers back to the determining hour of vs. 23. Jesus speaks here about what His suffering and death means for the world, i.e. her destruction. 'World' here means organized power of evil. *The 'prince of this world'* is the devil. He has, as 'the father of lies'(8:44) the world in his power(16:11). *Driven out* means outside his territory, the world. He is a dethroned ruler. Jesus has penetrated into his domain (Matt. 12:28. BEKNOPT COMMENTAAR OP DE

questions remain vague and are filled, at least in part, with elements which are foreign to the Scriptures, our stance on practical issues is unnecessarily weakened. The ongoing development of the history of revelation provides another point of contact between human history and Satan. As we have noted, Job's own knowledge of the kingdom of darkness may have been significantly less well developed than that of the authors of the book of Job. Moreover, the course of the history of revelation is directly related to the development of human history as the history of salvation. In the days of Job, Satan had some rights and could appear in God's presence; but after his loss of title and power as Prince of the world, he is no longer able to do that. Although we will have difficulty in coming to a complete understanding of spirits through demonology, we must study carefully the details of revelation as they are given and apply them scrupulously in our discussions. Otherwise we will continue to live in a 'fool's paradise' and, of course, that would suit Satan just fine.

4. The Prologue in Heaven – II

Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6 presents the discussion between the Lord and Satan. The first thing we notice here is that God call the Prince of Darkness to account. It is only a preliminary accounting, but Satan has to swallow his hatred to submit to God's questioning regarding his activities. With calm sovereignty the Omniscient One asks Satan what he has been up to . And the devil answers that he has been roaming about, searching the earth. He tries to assume an air of independence but the fact that he is questioned proves the opposite. First of all he cannot avoid revealing the inferiority of his activities: he's been roaming about on the earth, where humankind have their home, looking for a victim. He is a furtive creature, always on the prowl, more powerful than human beings, yet dependent on them. For, in the second place, his answer shows that he has no history of his own but only lives within the context of human history. Only by interfering with human history is his own existence given an air of historicity.

Angels are servants according to Hebrews 1:7 and 14. Fallen angels are fallen, faithless servants who sabotage humankind instead of providing service. That is why the kingdom of darkness has a particularly ignominious character. Accordingly one may question whether the portrayal of Satan based on Goethe's 'Faust', a portrayal of a spirit of denial, accurately reflects the evil one. For the figure of Satan in 'Faust' has something majestic about him, but the

portrayal in the first and second chapters of Job has nothing of that majesty. He is a furtive, prowling and cowardly creature. There are many indications in the Scriptures that the kingdom of Satan flourishes because of its brilliant organization and its power, a power to which the fallen and broken human race is by no means equal. Yet the Scriptures also repeatedly indicate that Satan is a coward. We are told, 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you' (James 4:7). This is also clear from the reactions of the evil spirits to the Saviour as the gospels tell us. And James 2:19 tells about the demons who 'shudder'. The ruler of the realm of darkness is well aware both that the God who, in Christ, has shown his mercy for the human world, is a fearful and powerful God and, that those who are blessed with God's mercy have received full authorization from their Saviour and can pose a real threat. Devils are much better at remembering these two factors than human beings, including those who have put their faith in Christ. The naive assumption that a demon would take to fearful flight upon seeing a crucifix, is not altogether beside the mark. The words of Yahweh, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him.' may well reflect a note of quiet mockery for Satan. We do well to take these words seriously. Job would never have been able to fulfill his role in the drama before us had he not been truly and completely blameless. Job is unique in the history of human piety and sanctity. We will observe him, a man to whom none of us can measure up, tested as it were by fire, yet coming out with wonderful, even dangerous statements which bring out a fearful response from Elihu. The story casts a new light on the depths of human misery, for with increasing clarity Job acknowledges his need for a Mediator and confesses, even when the Lord praises him, that he can live only by grace.

But Satan answered the Lord, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' Whoever repeatedly reads the book of Job can hardly avoid shuddering at these words. For here we note the first step on the road that leads to suffering and misery for Job. But we must also remember that when the Lord calls Job, 'my servant', He also says 'my creature' and 'my child'. And whoever interferes with God's children, touches the apple of His eye. What's more, Satan, as he begins the process, knows that. In a sense we might say that this fallen angel does not know what he is doing; he certainly does not have the faintest idea of the punishment that he is calling down on himself. On the other hand, this fallen angel is no free agent, for he is driven increasingly closer toward divine judgement through his own evil inclination. At the same time, we note how calmly the sovereign Lord gives Satan His permission: 'everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.'

And Satan goes his way. In the heavens God waits patiently for him to act; he knows how

bad the situation is. For God each moment of time is an eternal present. And, with even more pain he also eternally reflects on the far worse suffering which will be inflicted on His own dear Son at the hands of this very same Satan.

After some time Satan returns; he must again give account of himself. From the passage of Job 2:1-6 we note an echo of the words of chapter 1:6-12, as if it were a refrain. This lends a strong poetic character to the prologue, a matter which must not escape our attention. We find an identical use of such a refrain also in Daniel 3. In that passage we are forcefully confronted with the approaching deployment of an evil world power. Here in Job 1 and 2, such a technique is used to help us understand the dignity and majesty of a sovereign God. Again, the Lord insists on the integrity of Job as He challenges his slave Satan. In the meantime, the evil one has been very busy, for he has ruined Job's wealth and murdered his children. He knows very well that he could only have done this because the Almighty had granted him permission. He also knows how much God loves Job. What's more, he is even proud of his work of destruction, just as one of his pitiable victims was proud when he saw the devastation of Rotterdam after it was bombed,¹⁰ 'We have done a magnificent job'. Yet Satan is always shuddering; he has no understanding of the ways of God's grace.

He is driven even further; in spite of himself he acknowledges God's omnipotence when he goes on to say, 'But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones'. And again Satan receives permission. The Lord has only one condition: having murdered Job's children, he may not touch Job's own life. Satan cannot but respect this limitation but he goes as far as he can, for he strikes Job with an illness known to be humanly incurable and so brings him close to his death.

The poet of this prologue had a tremendous insight into the character of Satan. That is evidenced in the insensitivity of his speech: 'Skin for skin'. Skin is used here to represent the whole body as an indication of our whole being. Satan supposes that if God stretches out His hand against Job's flesh, the latter would want to save himself rather than continue in his service to the Lord.

We must note in all of this that Job's faith did not embrace a continuation of time beyond death and the final judgement. Only in the course of his suffering does he arrive at such an insight and, in this respect, Job is one of the very few of those belonging to the Old Covenant to do so. It was his testing and suffering which led him to that insight.

5. Calamity Overtakes Job **(Job 1:1-5; 20-22)**

Job was wealthy. In this regard his situation and circumstances are comparable with those of Abraham. Both Abraham and Job had a patriarchal type of life; but theirs was not identical to the original patriarchy of the day of Adam and his offspring. That patriarchy disappeared before the Flood, perhaps through a levelling process of the social structure. Yet in the family of Noah the memory survived, for Noah himself preserved numerous characteristics of the traditional patriarchy. After the Flood, with the beginning of political organization, the line of Shem, especially, maintains the patriarchal tradition. But often the two are integrated in public life, as in the case of Abraham and his family before he left Ur.

Job knew city life and also participated in it from time to time, as we read in 29:7. But, for the most part, he lived outside the urban centre and here he was apparently a ruler in his own right. One might call him a shepherd king. His possessions of cattle, pastures and fields were unusually large.

The very wealthy person cuts a remarkable figure in history. In order to enter the Kingdom of God, the wealthy must crawl through the eye of a needle.¹¹ And affluence corrupts. Yet such affluence also invariably means an enhancement of cultural possibilities. For the wealthy build up for themselves a life of luxury, refinements and culture. Riches can provide the means for a secluded life of opulence and privatized culture. On the other hand, cultural development always needs a considerable economic basis. But we frequently discover that through a division of labour, the rich are not usually themselves the instigators of cultural development. Nonetheless, we find that personal riches of money and possessions often do accompany an interest in promoting the advancement of civilization. We may think of the Popes of the 15th and 16th Century, of the Venetian Doges or the families described by Galsworthy in his Forsyth Saga.

Yet Job as a rich person certainly did not fit the stereotype of affluence as a corrupting influence. This is a truly remarkable characteristic of the portrayal of Job, and we must assume that the authors of the book of Job knew of it from very old documents. Oral tradition could hardly have preserved such a beautiful characterization.

¹⁰ At the beginning of WWII in May 1940

¹¹ see: Mt 19:24; Mk 10:25; Lk 18:25

In chapter 29, from the depth of his sorrow, Job brings back memories of the days of his prosperity. From that chapter we get to know him even better than from the portrayal in the first and second chapters. As an independent person, Job does not isolate himself. The rulers of the nearby city took his wishes and plans into consideration when they gave judgement. He appeared regularly as the advocate of the weak, defending them in lawsuits and alleviating their social disadvantages. He was a man of great influence even without holding any political position.

King Solomon was another man of great wealth and cultural refinement. The Bible reflects this very clearly. And even if the motivation which promoted the gathering of wisdom literature, including the book of Job, may be credited to the cultural achievement of Solomon, he was nonetheless inferior to Job when we compare lifestyles, for the life of this king gives living proof that affluence corrupts and enjoyment degrades. As a person Job also rises above Abraham, for Abraham was not 'blameless', as the Lord Himself characterizes Job. And in Canaan Abraham remained a far more isolated figure that Job was in Uz.

In the days when disaster strikes Job his children are already adults. Dr. K. Sietsma (who considers the book of Job as one in which God justifies Himself) describes the pleasant relationships of Job's family members as follows: the grown sons each have their own homes; when there is a major festivity, like a birthday or feasting connected with sheep-shearing, the sons hold a week of celebration in which each in his turn act as host and invite their (presumably younger) sisters. In this connection we are informed of Job's priestly concern, for after such a celebration he would purify his children with sacrifices, explaining that perhaps his children had sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Dr. Sietsma is right in referring to their behaviour as a 'careless neglect of God in their merriment'.

In one day Job lose all his possessions in cattle, and on this very day all of his ten children also die. The report of this event leads us to believe that Job and his children lived in houses, not tents, even though Job uses the words 'my tents, in 29:4. So he also differs from the patriarch Abraham in this respect.

'At this Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship'(1:20). It is a useless exercise to try to identify, even imaginatively, with the grief of Job. A man who loses all his possessions, everything which contributes to his public status, and also loses his children, all in one day, experiences a sorrow which no outsider can fathom. It is remarkable that such sorrow does not paralyse Job or drive him to insanity. He remains

completely human. He uses an old saying, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there.' (cf. footnote NIV- Popma has, 'I shall return to the womb of the earth.')

Attributing to Job the belief on which this expression seems to rest would lead to misunderstanding. The words themselves clearly reflect the idea of 'autochthony'¹² or 'spontaneous generation', pointing to the notion that earth of itself brings forth people. The Old Testament also uses the expression, 'none of his words fall to the ground'¹³, while the concept of the winged word is rejected in Jewish faith; in this same way Job too did not share in the concept of the life-giving earth.¹⁴

He uses the proverb in order to give expression to his total loss of all the possession, rendering him equal to the human condition at birth and death.

In all this Job did not sin; nor did he unfairly accuse God; he does not even come up with a mild accusation.

We must remember, however, that unlike the present-day reader of the book of Job, Job could not look behind the scene: he was not aware of the discussion between God and Satan.

¹² Dutch: *autochtone*- means 'sprung from the land itself' but has the connotation in English of *aboriginal* or *native*. I have used 'spontaneous generation' to indicate the meaning of the author. JVM

¹³ 1Samuel 3:19

¹⁴ Popma's argument seems to be that one need not accept that Job personally accepted the beliefs reflected in a literal reading of his statements.

6. Job's Total Poverty (2:7-10)

The following attack was far worse. Now it involved Job's own body; and when we speak of our body we refer to ourselves. Throughout the course of history, philosophical world views have often attempted to promote a separation of body and soul, indicating that what happens to the body does not really affect the soul. The body is regarded as the prison or tomb of the soul and is sometimes greeted as 'our brother the donkey'; the soul, on the other hand, is regarded as the residence of faith while the body is only flesh. Some have gone far in despising their body. We may think of Simon Stylites, the pillar saint, who for years during the 5th Century AD, lived on a small platform on top of a pillar, neglecting himself until he became very ill; Westerners are not usually known for such ascetic neglect of the body, while in the East, especially in India, one can find much better examples of ascetic self-control. The problem for those who wish to neglect the body is that they do need the cooperation of the flesh. The soul can't possibly be responsible for everything, for strength of will, nerves, thought and the brain. Of course the soul is involved, but it is involved in all of life. Job must have had a very fine appreciation for the involvement of the soul with the body; we might even say that he sensed that the soul gives life to the body just as the body embraces the soul. For at the end of the tale he gave his beautiful daughters names reflecting items used for women's make-up: 'Keziah' and 'Horn of Oil'. We may dismiss the thought that Job would not have influenced the choice of names for his daughters. He must have known that caring for one's looks is a matter of religion. We sometimes short-circuit the issue by insisting that use of lipstick indicates a worldly lifestyle. That is quite foolish. To be sure, one may incorporate the use of lipstick in a worldly lifestyle; but even carrying one's Bible does not prevent one from living a worldly lifestyle. Those who neglect their appearance are guilty, even if their sin is only one of deficiency of aesthetic appreciation. Surely, aesthetic appreciation has its own religious root. We can dismay our Lord and vex our neighbours (or even cause them to stumble in the biblical sense) when we neglect our hair and ignore an unpleasant body odour. Job knew that, as the author of Ecclesiastes tells us, sweet smelling oils are to be used and, in public life, function much like a good reputation. These are the things we must think of when we read about Job's physical suffering. There is something moving and also child-like in the way Job reacts to his calamity. He leaves his community and friends, leaves his house, avoids the city-gate and retreats to a place far away from the city, a place where garbage is dumped and burned. Even people from 4000 years ago had some awareness of hygiene. But they were also

aware of a religious significance of garbage and its disposal by burning: the garbage dump is a place for those who have become outcasts. Job may have surmised that his illness was contagious and that, like a leper, he must seclude himself.

His illness progresses quickly. We must not underestimate the power of the world of demons; we ordinarily think far too little of them. To be sure, they can do no more than what God permits, but let us not forget that they are by nature servants of mankind and thus know much about us and are able to affect us greatly through their rebellion and sabotage of God's plan. The more skilled the butler, the more damage he can do when he turns traitor. And the world of Spirits is eminently suited for its task through God's perfect creation ordinances. This is why the demons have such a great potential for doing damage; their power is even more damaging because humanity since the fall is ever more susceptible to the influence of demons. It is hard to give an accurate account of these matters in a scientific or philosophical context, but they must play a significant role in our world view. And the questions and warnings which arise from a scripturally-directed world view, are useful in all the sciences. Responsible work in physics and biology should not neglect the influence of demons on the world. Where we recognize the purely physical or biological laws of nature we may well be observing the results of active involvement of evil spirits.

Job regards himself as an outcast. He does not know of Satan's plan, nor does he know the limits God has placed on Satan. As far as he knows his life is finished. He experiences misery and has no opportunity to forget it. He has so much pain that he cannot even sleep. As a man in the prime of his life, he is not instantly destroyed by the illness. But it is also his vitality which allows him to experience his suffering so deeply. Nor is he inclined to avoid facing the pain, even though it is not, as such, wrong to do. The Scriptures tell us: 'let them drink...and remember their misery no more'¹⁵. Such teaching authorizes us to use pain-killers and even narcotics, although these always pose a danger for human dignity, threatening that which needs to be protected in our religion. Dr. Abraham Kuyper may go too far when he suggests, in one of his meditations, that Christians ought to be conscious and alert when they die. Yet this reveals the remarkable attitude of Job, for even when he considers his life as hopeless he refuses the use of narcotics.

The poison of narcotics affect both the body and the heart; Job needed all his strength. When his wife visits him at the garbage heap she says, 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!' some have considered her reaction to be depraved but that is most unfair.

She loved him and cared for him. She too lost her position and her children. And she watched her beloved overcome by tremendous suffering and desolation. To watch a loved one's suffering can cause a special kind of pain that is nearly unbearable even for someone who can face up to almost anything else in life. And Job's wife must have felt that a great injustice had been done; it could hardly be any worse. In a sense she is right; the work of the evil one is indeed, ...exceptionally evil. But she did not have the same vision as her husband. He remained devout even without understanding it at all. For her that is impossible. Her suggestion that he curse God and die is not an encouragement to suicide, as is sometimes claimed. Rather, she indicates a recognition of what is in fact happening to Job: he is already dying.

But his answer is a calm one. In Job's time prayers of cursing were well known; but it is noteworthy that in his response Job does not curse his wife. He does not call her a fool or and ungodly woman but says, 'you are talking like a foolish or godless woman'. With this he implies that she is in fact not foolish or ungodly.

7. The Arrival of Friends **(2:11-13)**

Job accepted his suffering. It is impossible to really *identify* with him, but we can get some sense of his suffering. The ability to *identify* with others' suffering characterizes the moral relationships we have with other people. Most of us are rather poor at this. Yet, we are able to feel empathy which influences moral relationships. When such identification with others does not develop with an eye to moral qualification, the result is a despicable fawning which shows feeling alright, but in a loveless manner; it may even reflect a secret enjoyment in the identification with the suffering of a neighbour. When true faith directs our heart, there is a greater ability of *identifying* but even so it is usually restricted to immediate family members. Job's wife did identify with his suffering. She was probably alone in this. As readers of the book of Job we do not have to make the attempt to identify with him. It is far beyond our experience. Perhaps this was exactly the reason why the book of Job has come to us in a poetic form: poetry makes it much easier for us to get a sense of his agony. And if our sensing is directed by religious obedience and is open to development with an ethical focus, our sharing in Job's suffering can enrich and enable us, for it contains a religious education that will enhance the quality of our

¹⁵ see Proverbs 31:7

own life.

Job accepted his suffering and gives an account of it: 'Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' this is what he tells his wife. Note the kindness of the inclusive word 'we'. He knows that she too has her share of sorrow.

The brief discussion with his wife reflects the height of moral pain, yet in all this Job did not sin by saying what he did. That is to say that no sinful word crossed his lips. When we say, 'no bad word ever came between us', we don't mean, 'but there were plenty of bad thoughts'. And when we read in Romans 10:10, 'it is with your heart that you believe, and with your mouth that you confess', this does not mean that faith is limited to the heart and confession to the mouth. Likewise, Job 2:10 does NOT mean that Job did not sin with his lips but did sin in his heart. We cannot take seriously enough the Lord's claims that Job was a blameless man. Time and again as we read the book of Job we need to remember that he was 'blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil'.(1:1) On many occasions we will discover the traces of that upright fear of God, even in passages where more traditional interpretations have failed to notice it.

Job receives a visit from his friends. Let us note first of all that he *has* friends. That is a precious possession. David calls the love of friends 'more wonderful than the love of women'.¹⁶ It is noteworthy in this book that Job's friends play a role which is much larger than that of his wife, even though she receives much respect. That fact that Job has friends with whom he discusses the deepest issues of life, shows us yet another side of his character. We are constantly amazed at the richness of his life. We must also note that the three men are Job's friends. This indicates that they are also people whom we ought to respect. Being a friend of Job would have meant belonging to the nobility of that time. We could easily underestimate these three friends. The question of their ability to *identify* with his misery can be answered, 'Partly'. They certainly tried very hard and they did have good intentions. They were pious people but their ethical appreciation of the situation revealed a religious flaw or shortcoming. This religious flaw determined the problematic character of their friendship. There is some evidence that their friendship did not survive this crucial exchange at the time of Job's great need. In their discussions with Job they clung to their religious myopia with the result that their attitude toward him became quite inhuman. But how could friends become so inhuman? That is a scary question. Anyone who has a friend whose attitude becomes inhuman knows *something* about

¹⁶ See 2 Samuel 1:26

that. A special evil surfaces in such a circumstance. If that friend turns to God the demonic factor may be removed but it is more than likely that the friendship will never be totally restored. In Job 2 we read of the three friends of Job but when in Job 42 the Lord speaks to Eliphaz: 'I am angry with you and your two friends', he no longer characterizes them as friends of Job.

Their initial actions, however, do reveal true and faithful friendship. We may find it difficult to understand this. They made an arrangement to visit him, to sympathize with him and to comfort him in his suffering. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they broke out in loud weeping, tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their head.

After that they remained sitting with him in silence. They were not ashamed to share his place of desolation. That indicates great kindness but also a moral power which should not escape us. Even among very good friends it is difficult to spend a whole evening in silence and experience the depth of friendship in such a way. With our normal, shallow friendships that would be quite impossible: these thrive on empty talk. When these friends spent time together in silence, there was an openness of spirit with one another.

In their silence the friends were open to Job's pain; they tried to identify with his suffering and communicated this to him. The way in which they show their friendship was conditioned by their lifestyle and culture. From our contemporary situation we find it hard to understand the form of friendship which existed among the people of the East of some 4000 years ago. But that is no reason to ridicule or to argue the unreliability of Scripture. We may say that we find it hard to relate to it. But that does not mean that it is impossible. When we reflect that these people lived so very far from our hurried lifestyle and that they had far more success in empathizing with one another, we may also have a little more understanding for their silence of seven days and seven nights.

8. Job Curses the Day of His Birth

(Chapter 3)

Of course, ethical relationships among friends embrace more than silent communing. It speaks well of the friends of Job, however, when we recognize that they could sustain such silence. But they were also aware that their sympathizing with him and comforting him could not stop with a silent presence.

It was Job himself who broke the silence, and in so doing he showed that he trusted his friends and counted on them. He must have had his reasons for this. He poured out his heart to them; it must have been a bitter disappointment when he noticed that they did not understand him.

At this point we are faced with a question of exegesis: did Job indeed express himself exactly with such a poem of cursing? It is not totally impossible but seems improbable. The authors of the book of Job must have considered the limitations of their readers and for this reason chose such a poetic style. When a person who has been the victim of a very great calamity pours out his heart in complaint, only a true friend is able to hear him. A lament of such bitterness is raw. Only a friend can listen to it. Even in this case, where the three men who had proven themselves to be very good friends, they were not able to understand his lament. That is why it is more likely that the complaint and song of cursing by Job has been handed down to us in poetic form. The various branches of literature differ in their expectations regarding the right of authors in transforming text into poetry. The speeches which occur in the historical account of Thucydides all reveal his own typical style even though we might think that the historian as a writer ought to maintain both the style and the very words of each of the figures portrayed.

When we consider the content of an imprecatory poem, we immediately face the difficult question: was it right for Job to curse the day of his birth? For does not he who curses the day of his birth also curse the One who has made him? 'For he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and Him Who sits on the throne'.¹⁷ So: he who curses the day of birth, seems to curse Him who has made that day.

But the matter is not that simple. Also in Jeremiah 20:14-18 we find a curse for the day of birth. Discussions on the proper use of Scripture often raise the question regarding the extent to which we can or may appropriate the words of Scripture for ourselves. To say that such appropriation is always misdirected fantasy is too easy an answer. Such an answer only gives

advice to leave the Scriptures unused. To be sure, we can be mistaken in this appropriation. And such errors may be more close at hand when it concerns a poem of cursing. We come upon the same problem in dealing with the imprecatory psalms or proverbs of Nehemiah.¹⁸

It would appear that we are moving in the right direction when we assume that Job was an upright and pious man, fearing God and shunning all evil. He was ignorant of the background given us in chapters 1 and 2. Beyond that, he stood at the threshold of a road which was to give a very special depth and breadth to his knowledge of faith. There were probably many Israelites who died in faith yet did not approach anything of the depth and breadth which we find in the book of Job. When he cursed the day of his birth, Job stood at the very beginning of that road. And as a beginning on a road that leads to greater faith, we may consider Job's curse as the lament of an upright and pious man, one who feared God and shunned all evil. At the same time, this imprecatory poem also demands greater understanding and insight.

Job focussed his attention on his distress and misery, and did not allow his life to be sullied by halfheartedness or irresolution and similar matters which could have pulled his life apart. Such a man experiences an even more bitter suffering and as he speaks of his misery, he reveals it in the darkest of colours.

He spoke to his friends. He counted on their understanding him. Maybe he was purposely one-sided. In his reflection on his misery he assumed that there was no longer any hope for him. He may have continued to live a little longer but had already begun to die. That was why the thought of another birthday was unbearable for him.

Of course he saw his calamity from a religious perspective. We must not assume that the people of the Old Testament only recognized earthly blessings while those of the New Testament look primarily for spiritual blessings. Those who lived thousands of years ago were human beings just like us and, certainly, were equally attuned to spiritual matters. Job testified to that in 29:4 where he spoke of a time, 'when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house'. Job was well aware that his wealth and luxury and the richness of having his children around him, all had a religious significance. Would not a person of our day who suddenly loses all his possessions, his business, status in the community, and all his children, also say with Job: now my life is shattered? Or do you think he would start to sing: 'I love to tell the story, of unseen things above'?

Job reflected only the vaguest idea about life after death in this imprecatory poem. But

¹⁷ See Matthew 5:34

¹⁸ e.g. see Nehemiah 13:25 ff.

his concept was not more vague than that of Hezekiah who many centuries later, when he was very ill said, 'I will not again see the Lord, the Lord, in the land of the living;'.¹⁹ And after his illness he said, 'For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, they praise you, as I am doing today.'²⁰

We must see Job's imprecatory poem in such a context. For he could say that in the realm of the dead... 'the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease, they no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slave is free from his master.' (3:17-19)

Another aspect of the imprecatory poem is the thought that we are not ultimately able to effect a curse. Job did begin by cursing his day of birth; he did not want to celebrate another birthday, even if he should live long enough to have one. After he wished that darkness, storm, thunder, an eclipse of the sun and thick clouds had covered that day, he said, 'May those who curse days²¹, curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan'(3:8). In these words Job referred to a superstition known to him but, definitely, not shared by him. These soothsayers were usually professional magicians who knew exactly how to pronounce a curse so that it would be effective. Job's view of pagan forms of religion is clear from 31:26 ff. where he stated that he never neglected God by worshipping the sun. Worship of the sun remained a strong temptation even for those who served the Lord. This we know from 2 Kings 23:11 where we read that Josiah took the horses that were dedicated to the sun and removed them from the entrance to the temple of the Lord; he also burned the chariots dedicated to the sun. But Job said, 'if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendour, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.' (31:26-28)

A person who speaks like this does not believe in the power of soothsayers; on the contrary, his reference to them reflects cynical ridicule: why didn't those clever soothsayers show their craft on the day of my birth!

This analysis also applies to the Leviathan mentioned in the second part of verse 8. The author does not suggest that Job believed in the Leviathan but implies that such monsters are

¹⁹ See Isaiah 38:11a

²⁰ See Isaiah 38:18,19

²¹ In Dutch '-dagvloekers' = soothsayers

accepted by those who also turn to magicians.²²

9. The First Speech of Eliphaz (Ch. 4&5)

The three friends were shocked by Job's speech. It touched their conscience, for Job's words went too far. In response Eliphaz speaks with the confidence of close friendship. But it becomes clear immediately, that the friends cannot match the depth of Job's thought. From his last words we know that Job did not consider himself guilty: he had not lived callously and yet had become the prey of sudden catastrophe: 'What I feared has come upon me ; what I dreaded has happened to me.' (3:25) He had always lived knowing that his daily bread and water were gifts of grace; but he did receive them. Job had an uncomplicated view of life, acknowledging that he did not deserve God's grace, yet certainly expecting to receive it. But his present predicament showed that this time it did not work out. Instead of God's grace he received His curse.

One can be sure that Job and his friends had discussed this topic more than once. And they probably agreed that those who lived in the fear of the Lord had a good life; those who practice an insolent lifestyle could expect disaster. But it didn't work that way for Job. 'What I feared has come upon me.' He had been robbed of the peace of his humility and integrity. He had lost peace of heart.

Eliphaz had a simple solution: having lost God's favour meant that he had led an impudent life. There was no other possibility. Eliphaz was no goody-goody-two-shoes, certainly not. On one point he agreed with Job; those who lived humbly in the fear of the Lord may have expected a blessed and peaceful life. But he also had his differences, for according to Eliphaz Job had always maintained that view and could not now desert such a position. He was like many who keep an eye on the sins that their neighbour might overlook, such as forgetting God with one's heart or secretly maintaining a proud heart.

We observe a change in Eliphaz's train of thought. He did hear something familiar in Job's words; he too had a fear like that of Job. Something terrible also once happened to him; he once had a vision. Of course we assume that he was telling the truth, remembering that having a

²² Elsewhere in the Bible we read of God defeating Leviathan just as He defeats the gods of the Egyptians; in both passages Leviathan may be regarded as a symbol of the evil one or of idol gods.

vision was not the same as partaking of a special revelation of God's Word. The vision frightened him terribly; he saw a ghost gliding by (4:15) and he heard a hushed voice, 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his maker?'(4:17) Eliphaz here presented a somewhat dualistic theology for without being conscious of it he apparently confused his own thoughts with words of revelation. In 4:18 ff. he appeared to be giving the application of his vision and in so doing, regarded angels as superior to humans. Indeed, for a time, the angels were exalted above humans in holiness²³ but that was not the intention of God's creation ordinances. Eliphaz referred to humans as 'those who live in houses of clay'(4:19) and thereby gave them a status lower than angels. Humans are insignificant and weak.

Eliphaz's manner of speaking about God makes us think of the Deus Exlex, the God of Fate or Chance. He even found fault with the angels(4:18). Mankind had his foundations in the dust (vs 19). When he spoke in verse 9 ff. about the great works of God, it sounded pretty orthodox. But Eliphaz did not honour God's covenant. There may have been hope for the poor(5:16) and it may have been dangerous to do foolish things. (5:12-14) In the conclusion of his speech Eliphaz was kind enough: he proved to be a good friend. But Job had to be reminded of two things: 1) no mortal can ever justify himself before God and, 2) those who suffer much are sure to be guilty.

Eliphaz was throwing things into confusion. Straighten things out with God, was his advice. There was something fawning about his religion and he messed around with the statements regarding God's grandeur, bringing it close to arbitrariness. Nor was his comment that Job was not to turn to any of the 'holy ones' (5:1), i.e. angels, in harmony with the Scriptures, for he assumed that God did not regard them to be fully pure. We must conclude that Eliphaz was actually challenging God's faithfulness.

²³ See Psalm 8:5, KJV

10. Job's Disappointment (Ch.6&7)

Job was deeply disappointed after the speech of Eliphaz. The pain he suffered never interfered with his ability to listen attentively. So he complained that his friends had not understood him; the other two apparently gave their silent approval during the speech of Eliphaz. Friendship counts on understanding,; one may expect it; is also God's law for friendship.²⁴ Eliphaz and his two companions broke that law.

It is remarkable that Job did not take back his curse. He admitted that the words he uttered may have sounded inconsiderate to them; but with their inability to understand him they also violated the demands of friendship. They should have understood that he felt himself trapped: on the one hand believing in God's justice and love on the other hand experiencing the very opposite. That was the source of Job's greatest misery.

He used sharp words to them for breaking the law of friendship: 'A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.'(6:14). He called them brothers who were not dependable (6:15). He urged them to relent, to reconsider because his integrity was at stake (vs 29). Job could neither understand nor tolerate that his friends might betray him. Although he suspected malice of a religious kind as the cause of their moral transgression, he continued to long for their friendship.

In 6:8-11 Job continued the theme of chapter 3. In that imprecatory poem Job expressed his desire to have died at birth; he envied the dead their peace. In 6:8 ff. we find the same longing for death. He would love to have accepted death as a gift of God; his life had become so meaningless that it would make sense to die now. All hope was now gone; he no longer had the strength to wait, nor any vision for a goal that would make his present experience meaningful. This is at the heart of the imprecatory poem: the existence of one so devastated and slowly dying is neither life nor death but only foolishness and meaningless.

Job, whose strength and vitality had always characterized him, had experienced human life so intensely that he knew death to be alien to it.²⁵ Weaker people would not experience that so clearly. We might speak of life as nothing but a constant death and mean it. If we are wiser than Job in this respect, it is because we have also learned much from him.

²⁴The idea that there is a Law of God for friendship stems from the concept that God rules His creation by means of laws (e.g.Ps.119). These laws are not limited to physical and biological laws that we observe in nature, they are also spelled out for us in the Scripture for all other relationships, i.e. marriage, neighbours, friendship, 'strangers in thy house', worship, business transactions, ethics, morals, etc.

²⁵We know that Job is no longer young; in 32:6 Elihu refers to him as aged.

In chapter 7 we find a second complaint of Job. It reveals an important step in Job's progressive understanding of his constant pain, and an ability to gather new and deeper insight into faith. And again we also note that his friends do not keep up with him; but we can hardly blame them. Later we will see that even Elihu could not keep up with him.

In a new attempt to convince his friends, Job reviewed his former and his present life and concluded that life was tough. It was as hard as the life of a mercenary or a slave. But the day labourer who all day long had worked his knuckles to the bone could look forward to his pay. Job's bitterness stemmed from the conclusion that his life was only futile, without meaning and without hope. With hardly a warning he alluded to his sickness: 'My body is clothed with worms and scabs,...'(7:5).

But now we note a change in Job's focus; away from his friends and towards God. He reminded God of his own insignificance as a human being. Why should the Almighty make so much fuss over one mortal? The complaint directed to God also continues in the vein of the imprecatory poem and he addressed God with a freedom of spirit and trust which strikes us as rather bold and aggressive. Job could not really understand that the Lord would consider him that important. Of course he did not know the background of the events experienced nor that in a dispute between God and Satan he was chosen as the vehicle for settling the difference and, in a grandiose way, to prove the evil one wrong; and God has given the evil one every possible chance to prove himself right. This was a holy game, one in which Satan got all the aces, but still he lost. Job, however, did not know that and indeed he was not allowed to know it. His part in this dispute dictated that he remain ignorant of the background.

'I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul'(7:11). Thus Job confessed the confinement of his spirit and his insignificance; and his confession was true. He would have none of the cheap theology like that presented by Eliphaz when he told him to straighten himself out with God, since with God one could never win the contest. Thanks, but no thanks, was Job's response. He never considered a denial of the words of the Holy One, (6:10) and had no intention of doing that now. Nor would he regard God to be an arbitrary power broker; and so he again asked what the Lord might want with him. How could the Lord have considered him, a mere human, to be so important? Was he then like the sea or a monster that needed to be guarded? (7:12). He sensed that the Lord was watching closely for his reaction and listening expectantly to his response. Yet he did not understand the intense interest. As Job maintained his blamelessness, he surmised, 'If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men?'(7:20)

What was the meaning of the Almighty keeping an eye on a human being as if he were a divine policeman? It was as if Job were saying, ‘Why do you make me a target? Even if there were transgressions, can You not pardon my sins? You yourself too will suffer loss; for this cannot go on much longer! Soon I will be gone and then You would note to your own detriment that You have stared me to death.’

11. The Attack of Bildad

(Ch. 8)

What the friends heard upset their orthodox ears. This man had some nerve to speak as he did. The friends proceeded along the path they had begun, doing violence to the law of friendship; they also continued to malign the Lord. Shortsighted though he may have been, Job had at least spoken well of the Lord. His worthy friends were not impressed. They clung to their true and tried orthodoxy and show us the dangers of exchanging exegesis for the living Word of which our exegesis is only a hearing aid. As a hearing aid it is imperfect and shares in human sin; only God’s Word is perfect. Only those who approach the Word with fear and trembling can achieve an exegesis which achieves perfection in the midst of defilement and imperfection.

*Simul justus et peccator.*²⁶

Job who maintained the words of the Holy One, confessed his faith. The friends also confessed their faith while they did NOT keep the words of the Holy One. Exegesis and confession are so closely related that we CANNOT listen to God’s Word without also confessing and, conversely, we cannot give a confession without listening to the Word. When we understand even one word of Scripture we understand it in the context of the teachings of the entire Bible; and when we summarize the teachings of the Scriptures as a whole in a confession, we are only referring back to the Scriptures.

Anyone who abandons scriptural teaching is also led toward a false confession. A false confession expresses a false religion. And those whose life embodies a false religion find themselves reduced to inhumanity. Bildad was insensitive enough to remind Job of the death of his children, adding a moralizing comment that God had given them over to their own iniquity (8:4). That was incredibly hard-hearted. It was also cunning, displaying the craftiness which is the hallmark of all perverse theology and ethics; for he protected himself by introducing the accusation with, ‘What if’.

Bildad was irritated with Job. He had the privilege of hearing Job's prayer of lament, witnessing new directions along the road of God's Self-revelation. But he was neither astonished nor thankful. He was irritated with Job's insolent words and unheard of boldness; he characterized them as blustering wind which destroys calm enjoyment of faith of the likes of Bildad. Job had to be a free-thinking radical. Did he not suggest that God perverted justice?(8:3) 'If (yes, note that satanic 'if') your children have sinned against Him, God has only given them the penalty they deserved.

Bildad has said evil things, but he was also human. Even the worst of his advice contained a remnant of pure friendship. He began by advising Job to make a deal with God. But then, with real sincerity, he indicated how beautiful his restoration would be. 'Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be,'(8:7). In spite of his annoyance and skewed religion, Bildad now became a prophet of a restoration which would indeed come true. Job, of course, knew nothing of this yet! Bildad was the first to anticipate it.

Bildad continued by developing a traditionalist viewpoint; he wanted to set Job straight in his modernism and therefore spoke of the power of long traditions. What was once handed down was true, as far as he was concerned, just because it had the advantage of age. We, however, were born only yesterday and know nothing.(8:9) In this way Bildad took the role of an enemy of the progress of Revelation.

What was the message of this tradition? Simply that, where there was suffering, it had to be rooted in sin as a necessity of natural law. Could papyrus grow tall where there was no marsh? Could reeds thrive without water?(8:11) He continued to use the metaphor of reeds as he developed another thought: those who had forgotten God, withered more quickly than reeds without water. Here too Bildad made no direct accusation. And again he ended his discourse with words which had a friendly ring to them. He was different from Eliphaz; he thought more clearly and spoke more carefully. His theology was certainly no better than that of his friend the Temanite. But he was clever. Did his friendly words also hide a kind of duplicity? (5-7;21-22).

We would rather suspect that for Bildad the bonds of friendship had greater strength. Both Eliphaz and Bildad regarded Job's views as much too subjective. Eliphaz responded with a revelation, even though he presented it in a rather confused manner, and Bildad preferred to concentrate on tradition. In this way they hindered the progress of revelation. Such men do not understand that they are playing with their own lives. Soon Job would have to bring an offering on their behalf and pray for them to save their lives.(42:8)

²⁶ At once righteous and sinful

12. Job's Answer To Bildad (Ch. 9&10)

In chapters 9 and 10 we find Job's answer. It is addressed to Bildad but he included Eliphaz in his reply. He gave a vehement self-defence, bordering on sarcasm, as he attacked the theology of the unknown God. The reference in 9:11 gives a fairly clear parody of Eliphaz's bewildering experience (4:15); and 9:10 is a literal quote of 5:9. This is enough to indicate the irony of Job's words, an irony as pointed as we find in 12:2, 'Doubtless you are the voice of the people, and when you die, wisdom will die with you!'²⁷

This is proof that we must not think of Job giving a defence of the theology of Eliphaz in chapter 9. Instead, what he said amounts to a biting parody of the friends showing them how far it will get him. Although there is another train of thought running through this answer (to which we will return later) it is soon interrupted and we first of all get the impression that Job is carried along by the God-talk of his friends.

In 9:20 the parody comes to its climax: had Job adopted the reasoning of his friends he would have said, 'Even if I were blameless, He would still pronounce me guilty'. This was the thought we find him returning to in 9:30 ff. But in 9:21 Job took a very different approach: 'I am certainly not guilty, and will maintain it even if it kills me'. [9:21, Popma] This gives a completely different tone from that of the ironic statement of 9:15, 'I could only plead with my Judge for mercy'.

The verses 9:33-35 first mention the possibility of reconciliation through judicial process. But it is only a wish, 'If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.' The vision of a mediator was still very vague here; it broke through momentarily and then it was gone. But it would return. His faith vaguely suspected the presence of a referee, an intercessor or a saviour. But at this point he could not get beyond the merest of indications. Only as his friends continued torturing him with their betrayal of *the law of friendship*, did he more firmly grasp this new insight into his faith.

With chapter 10 he continued the complaint which he began in chapter 3, picked up in chapter 6:8-10 and pursued in chapter 7. Again we hear of Job's misery and oppression; here too he asked why God considered him so important. Job could not confess God's majesty in the

manner of Eliphaz and Bildad but expressed amazement at God's presence: 'Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees?' Job experienced God's nearness and in desperation asked how the Creator could get so angry with His own creature.

Through these remarks we understand the significance of the imprecatory poem in the book of Job: he returned to it constantly. The shortcomings which we already noticed in chapter 3 become clearer and clearer. Job had a clear vision for what was before him but his range was limited. If he had a better and fuller vision than his friends, he also had to strive to gain deeper insight. In this attempt at making progress he often stumbled but also got up again. Much of the book of Job is taken up with the description of the role assigned to Job in the history of God's self-revelation.

His was a difficult task; it could only be carried out by Job himself. Through Job's wavering and struggle we note the Spirit of Christ struggling along with him. It was a struggle of obedience. Job maintained his innocence, 'You know that I am not guilty' (10:7). But then he was obsessed with the question of how God could reduce his own creature to such poverty, for he remembered his beginnings, how God had shaped him as it were with the tender care of a mother. Job did not share the contempt for created things shown by Eliphaz who spoke of people 'crushed more readily than a moth' (4:19). Job admired God's creation, 'Remember that you moulded me like clay; will you now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over me.'(10:9-12).

The lament which followed revealed a low point; Job came close to the position of his friends when he said, 'If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion' (10:16). The immaturity of faith that we already noticed in his imprecatory song, now returns to the foreground. Job concluded his answer with a lament as pitiful as that of chapter 3; but there is a difference, for in chapter 3 he spoke of the realm of the dead as a place of rest but here he called it a 'land of deepest night, of deep shadow and disorder' (10:22). Were these still the words of Job, the blameless one, or do these words reveal the unredeemed myopia of a man who had not yet seen the full light of God's revelation? (We may note that in 40:2 God referred to Job as one who contends with the Almighty, and that in 42:3 Job referred to him self as one who lacks understanding. *Nonetheless in 42:8 God Himself says that Job has spoken well of Him.*)

²⁷ The Jerusalem Bible most closely reflects the irony intended.

So, even this agonizing lament gives evidence of progress in understanding. Job had learned that death did not mean rest. All he hoped for was a few moments of joy before departing to the land of deepest night. (10:20).

13. Zophar's Poisoned Onslaught (Ch. 11)

The third friend now took the floor. With Zophar the discussion took another turn for the worse; apparently the friends could not resist the temptation to use inhumane treatment and his words most strongly betrayed their relationship.

He began with demeaning accusations, calling Job an idle talker, a mocker. Such accusations were all the worse because he interlaced them with pious words that appear to witness to God's greatness. He pointed out that we could not fathom the mysteries of God; this is not false, as such. We recognize it as a lie when we notice that exactly at that time God was busy writing a new chapter in the history of His self revelation, making a new addition to His Word .and making that Word more accessible to us. He wove into its fabric the ups and downs, the experiences and sorrows of the life of Job. In this way Job's life story seems to give human proportions to God's revelation.

The abusive Zophar resisted such a progressive self-revelation of God and allowed himself to serve as Satan's henchman. Zophar iwa the ancestor of all those who when they use Scripture, try to reduce its scope, whether by overevaluation of dogma or by erecting barriers for the proper practice of God-fearing piety. These people can do immeasurable damage. They destroy the key to wisdom; they themselves refuse to enter, but what is worse, they also prevent others from entering.

Zophar was Job's friend, yet he did irreparable damage to that friendship when he called Job an airhead, 'But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can become a man.'(11:12). With this he called Job a fool, a religious fool. For as long as Job maintained the purity of his beliefs and his innocence before God (11:4) there could be no hope for him.

Zophar perplexes us. How can one person so belittle another? Could he really be considered a friend, a close friend, one with whom Job could speak about spiritual matters? But even in the church some of the worst things can happen and the worst of sins can be committed.

After this satanic onslaught, Zophar changed his tune. We would expect that he really did intend to encourage Job with his final words, 'Life will be brighter than the noon of days and darkness will become like morning.'(11:17). But only a foolish person would think that Job could have found such words of comfort acceptable coming as they did at the end of a torrent of accusations. Bildad, at least, ended his speech with kind words (8:21 ff.); but that would be asking too much of Zophar; he ended with a condemnation of the godless and, with shameless certainty, counted Job among them.

14. Job's Forceful Response (Ch. 12)

If any person has ever derived strength from weakness, it must have been Job after the shameless accusations of his three friends. This time he did not spare them. He mocked them and sneered at them - they deserved no better. Instead we marvel at how this man, though deathly ill, could pull himself up with such dignity. We may assume that this answer too has been handed down to us in a poetically stylized form. Yet, had it been an unworthy answer, no more than ranting, any attempt to give it poetic form would have been useless. No, we may safely assume that Job, though broken down, was inspired to gather his strength to offer his friends a rebuttal.

In the beginning of chapter 12 we find the sharpest and most cutting passages of the whole book. It shows us that the man Job who was upright and blameless and avoided all evil, was also capable of anger. The exchange had reached an impasse. Job's friends had demeaned themselves and were guilty of inhumane accusations; but that was not Job's main concern. Much worse was their insistent denial of the truth. While they used pious language, they incorporate it in making a case which arose from their own ideas, not from the words of God.

This is an ever present danger for we use human insight as we understand God's Word. We must not equate our exegesis with the Word of which it gives an explanation. Yet there is a point of contact; from our exegesis we continually go back to the Scriptures themselves and our theories fall short of a proper account of that process. The relationship between the Word of God and human exegesis is in some way inscrutable, because it represents first and foremost the relationship between God and humans not the relationship between humans and God.

Job's friends forgot to differentiate between their exegesis and the Word of God; and in so

doing they attempted to confine God's revelation to their own limitations. We are all too familiar with this process: mixing up God's Word with human words; the mixture often shows far too much the colour of human ingenuity. At the same time we take pride in the divine aspect of our words while in fact they have lost all godly splendour. We will soon hear God's judgment in such practices, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right'(42:7).

We must not conclude that the matter is quite that simple, however, for we must not reduce the inscrutability of God's covenant relationship with his people. Job too would be admonished, twice, by the Lord, 'Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?'(40:2). Again in 42:3 Job repeated God's words from 38:2, 'Who is this that darkens my counsel with the words of knowledge?' In these words we hear a judgement also on Job's way of thinking. Although we assumed that Job was irreproachable in our explanation of the imprecatory poem (chapter 3), Job's friends appear to have assumed that he was not blameless. They advised him to straighten out his affairs with the Lord, as the plan of action which could best serve his interest. Job rejected their advice although he did not reject their intent.

We come here to a major issue in the book of Job. How are we to evaluate what is properly our business as human beings and what belongs to God? At the beginning, throughout the discussions between God and Satan, it was quite clear that God's interest was central. Remember? What is truly important is that the Lord does all that pleases Him and that none of His plans will fail.(p11).

It is noteworthy that Job's friends did not object as Job focussed on his own best interest in stating his case. They did object to his claim of innocence, the very issue that could not be reduced to a personal matter. Nor could Job repudiate his own innocence as if it were not a reality, not based on truth. Sometimes, after a terrible fall into sin, a person can come to himself and arrive at a very deep insight regarding the evil of his own heart. Surely that is possible although it is hard work. We must distinguish this from self-reproach that smacks of haughty self-interest. From late antiquity we have accounts of Christians who were not satisfied with the realization of their misery and consciously tried to increase their pain to the limits of their tolerance. From later centuries, too, we read of people whose distorted thinking led them to search out and even celebrate perfection of suffering. Such an enterprise is based on a denial of innocence, even the innocence God Himself has given us.

This was the very path on which Job's friends were rushing headlong. They advised Job to prostrate himself before the Lord to deny his innocence. Then everything would turn out well

for him. But this was a thoroughly pagan approach, as if utter self condemnation would arouse divine pity. It was rooted in deceitful thinking that giving up a worldly minnow would land us a heavenly salmon. Whether or not such self-condemnation was legitimate it also smacked of arrogance, implying that human beings might be authorized to sit on God's judgement seat.

As Job began to give his foolish friends a vehement response he himself had not yet recognized the point at which his own interest coincided with God's cause. He recognized this only when the Lord answered him out of the thunder storm *for the second time*. At this point he was still progressing towards that discovery; he still had to grow in wisdom and knowledge about God and himself. Such progress toward perfection, however, was almost imperceptibly mingled with imperfections and lack of understanding.

All the same, at this phase on the road to wisdom, Job was able to reproach and denounce his friends, 'Doubtless you are the voice of the people! And when you die, wisdom will die with you!'(12:2) Job ridiculed them for their foolishness but he also pointed out that foolishness in the context of the covenant, meant impiety.

15. Job Argued His Reproach (Ch.12 cont.)

The foolish advice of the friends represented a failure to appreciate Job's humanity. That is why he said, 'But I have a mind as well as you, I am not inferior to you.'(12:3) Stupid advice insults the intelligence of one's companion. The friends wanted to set Job's life in order, just as we too are often inclined to take charge of the lives of people whom God has put on our path. Fix this, change that and all their problems should be resolved. But we forget that those whom we encounter in this way are human beings. The fastest way of uncovering our error is to remind ourselves of our own human condition, 'In everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.'²⁸

Indeed, our world is filled with people who, with the best of intentions, end up dehumanizing their neighbours. We see it in slavery, in certain methods of raising children, in much of politics, large corporations and even in marriage and in the church. A government which secures its own position by obliterating the rights of its citizens, is no more

²⁸ See Matthew 7:12

guilty than marriage partners who regard each other as personal property.

‘Who does not know all these things?’(12:3) With these words Job did not intend to affirm the wisdom of his friends; rather, he indicated that all their comments were beside the point, for they didn’t apply to him in his situation. In the words which followed he focussed on the way in which they had ridiculed him in their talk.

The Bible does not make light of a ‘mockers’; the word carries a derogatory meaning. Psalm 1 gives a clear indication by associating the words godless, sinners and mockers. With their quick advice and tidy solutions for Job to make things right with God by confessing his sin and, as it were, buying satisfaction, Job’s friends had made a mockery of him. That was a serious accusation. A mocker has no respect for the Creator and His creatures. These friends undermined Job’s human feelings and violated the rules of the God Who had made Job human.

Mockers respect neither humanity nor creatureliness. Had they but directed their attention to the rest of creation, had they watched the birds, the fish or the earth, they would have known better.(12:7,8) For even the creatures that surround us which do not have our nature, can teach us valuable lessons. This was Job’s point when he said, ‘Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?’ (12:9) Job was not ascribing religious knowledge to the animals or to the earth but he directed his friends to note the dependent, creaturely nature of all that has been created. In as much as all these things are created they testify to the secret ways of God and thus can teach us, his people. Job had just finished reminding them of the dreadful nature of mocking. ‘I have become a laughingstock to my friends’(12:4); he continued in this vein while he complained that friendship, one of the highest forms of human interaction, has been defiled by ridicule. He compared his friends to marauders who lived at ease, feeding on ill-gotten gain, little realizing that God Himself had given them the power for their deeds.

If only the friends had recognized Job’s creatureliness! Surely they would have understood that his ears could distinguish their words. Those addressed can taste words heard just as those who eat taste the food taken in. This is how experience is gained. One need not be ashamed of it nor underestimate its truth. This, it would appear, constituted Job’s answer to the comments of Bildad, ‘For we were born only yesterday and know nothing’(8:9).

Job continued to speak at length about God’s omnipotence. Growth in knowledge progressed in spiral fashion,(12:13-25): just as he drew closer a new twist along the path caused him to veer away again. With these verses Job nearly achieved the insight gained by the end of his suffering; but he was not yet ready for that final step.

‘To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his’ (12:13). This was the theme of Job’s hymn of praise for God’s sovereign power. ‘He is almost there!’, we would say; but we forget that Job had to work his way through these wearisome circles of growth in order to attain such insight on behalf of the whole human race. Wisdom is simple but those who focus on finding it will realize that it consumes full and undivided attention only to discover that we receive the treasure for which we have given up everything, for free.

In some ways Job’s song of praise reminds us of the song of Hannah and the song of Mary. ‘The bows of the warriors are broken’; ‘Those who were full hire themselves out for bread’; ‘He has brought down rulers from their thrones’, and ‘He has sent the rich away empty’.²⁹ But the songs of Hannah and Mary also show us another side of God’s power, ‘... those who stumbled are armed with strength’; ‘... those who are hungry, hunger no more’; ‘...(he) has lifted up the humble; ‘...he has filled the hungry with good things’.³⁰ Are we then to conclude that Job’s praise was one-sided and the clue to his error? That is a little too simplistic. Job lived many centuries before Hannah and many more centuries before Mary; besides, he was concerned with an entirely different issue. Hannah and Mary spoke of their blessings and riches; Job reflected on his unspeakable poverty and brokenness. The time when he would regain his strength and return to a peaceful life, when he would regain his dignity and his possessions, still was so far removed that it was impossible for him to discern. It lay *far beyond his horizon*. To understand this we must remember that Job was still thinking that his life was coming to an end for he was deathly ill and the maggots were already claiming their prey (7:5). Job knew nothing of the discussion between God and Satan, and his role may well have been an impossible one had he known of that exchange. All he knew was that his world was completely devastated; his possessions were destroyed, his sons and daughters were dead, his wife began talking like a fool and his friends, his very last resort, had reduced themselves to inhumane and callous mockers. In all this Job recognized only the creaturely and the human side of the situation. Human insensitivity is all the more terrible because it is a fellow human who causes it. As for the demonic element stirring behind the scene here, the deceitful saboteur at the root of this inferno of evil, of all this Job knew nothing nor *should* he know anything.

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²⁹ See 1 Samuel 2:4a,5a; Luke 1:52a,53b

³⁰ See 1 Sam. 2:4b,5b; Lk. 1:52b,53a

6. Job Denounced the Foolishness of His Friends

(Ch. 13:1-12)

With sharp accusation Job dissected the foolishness of his friends. ‘What you know, I also know’ (13:2), he said and repeated what he had said before, that their words had no effect on him, because their advice did not fit his situation. From later discussions we may be assured that Job had no intention of acknowledging even some relative truth in the words of his friends. In fact he accused them of betrayal: they had proven themselves faithless in saying such things. ‘I desire to speak to the Almighty, and to argue my case with God.’ Job named God the Almighty One in order to indicate that with a God who was Almighty he had a better chance of being heard than with his friends. He knew that even if he adopted *their* point of view, the Almighty would not violate him as they had done.

Perhaps the deepest of Job’s suffering was caused by the unfaithfulness of his friends. He knew what friendship meant and experienced the terrible consequences of broken friendship.

From the depth of his pain he lashed out at them, ‘You plug all the holes in your theology with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you’.³¹ This was no small talk. Each of the friends has tried his hand at theology and Job accused them of cleverly covering up the gaps in their thinking with plaster; they acted like quacks. Job’s attack was brutal. The friends were guilty of using God’s name in vain. Their warnings and twisted words of comfort bordered on blasphemy. Their behaviour reminded Job of those who professed to know a trade without understanding a bit of it, like the doctor who could only talk medical language or the builder who bungled his work. Yet the three friends were men of great wisdom. Job had good reasons of selecting these as his friends. But their implementation of that wisdom represented total failure. Theirs were bad sermons; and was there anything worse than a bad sermon? It was worse even than the deceitful temptation of a prostitute.

Did they really think that the Lord needed their kind of help? They made bad lawyers; their prattle only served to place the exalted God in a bad light. Did God the Lord need lying counsellors to sanctify His Holy Name? Those who made sermons in which the Lord’s cause was twisted, proclaimed a crooked God.

There is no scarcity of such sermons even today. Things would not be as bad in this world if there were no bad sermons. Nothing spoils our life like a bad sermon, for in it we call upon the Name of the Lord. By means of sermons we proclaim to the whole world that God has issued

His divine decree of grace and salvation over all the earth in order to enter the hearts of all people. Any false note used in this call violates God's holy decree. It would be far better for a faithless preacher and for the whole world were he to maintain silence and refrain from speaking altogether.

'If only you would be altogether silent! For you, that would be wisdom'(13:5). Even a fool when he is silent is considered wise. Job attempted to set his faithless friends straight, hoping that they would accept his correction and heed his accusations. 'Will you speak wickedly on God's behalf?' (13:7). In their attempt to justify the ways of God they attributed unholy actions to Him. They wanted to be on God's side and presented themselves as intercessors on his behalf. But as intercessors for God, they did incalculable damage.

Is any Christian free of guilt in this respect, when it comes to their relationship with themselves and with their neighbour? Even in relation to our own selves we sometimes try to justify the ways of God as if He needed to be excused for causing the ills in our lives. When we do this to ourselves it is as bad as when we do it to others. For with ourselves we probably need even more patience, more tact and kindness than when we deal with our neighbour. It is noteworthy that when we try to prove God right with our own conniving means, we at the same time also close our hearts to God's words. Far too much of the power of faith has been broken in this way and the tender young fruits of the Spirit have been damaged and spoiled. Few sins are as despicable as grovelling before the Lord, for those who grovel show that they believe in a God who is dangerous and unpredictable, a God who must be appeased with bribery.

The actions of the friends show that they had not put their faith in a God who could be trusted; that is why they went to great length to praise his power. One cannot be too careful with a God who is so powerful. Who knows, He might just catch you in a death-trap and that would be the end of you.

Many pagan religions are based on belief in an unpredictable God. What is even worse, many forms of the Christian faith are also tainted with such a poison. It is truly incomprehensible that our world still exists.

Job warned his friends against their false view of God. God Himself would recognize it and would not tolerate it. If they hoped to safeguard themselves by grovelling, they must have realized that nothing else presented a greater threat to their sense of security. Their fawning attitude showed that they had created a false image of God for themselves; they sinned against the second commandment by reducing Him to their own level. 'Your maxims are proverbs of

³¹ This translation from the Dutch is stronger than the NIV-see 13:4

ashes', (13:12) Job said, giving his devastating judgement on their theology. Wishing to protect themselves they used shields which provided no defence, for they were but shields of clay.³²

17. Job's Case Before the Lord (Ch. 13:13-19)

After such an extremely harsh rejection of the defamatory theology of his friends, Job turned in a more positive direction to present his case before the Lord. He invited his friends to sit in on the case and listen carefully.

This was a big step forward for Job. He was now sure that he could plead his case before the Lord. There was something regal in his plea, as well as in his attitude towards his friends. This time, too, Job would not attain his goal but we note with how much energy and certainty he made this new beginning. Job had gained a lot of strength and faith, even though he was still not able to make the definitive and final step of the journey. Yet we are struck by the new tone of his argument.

'Keep silent and let me speak' (13:13), he asked his friends. Their speeches were but foolishness; they should now have had the wisdom to keep silent. He wanted to speak and, 'let come to me what may' (vs13b). With this added comment he showed a certain weakness. Job did not have certainty that his attempt would not prove disastrous for him. In this he showed an imperfection of faith which would soon wreak its vengeance on him. He made an even bolder comment, "why do I put myself in jeopardy" (13:14) expressing his realization that the plea may cost him his very life. In the second half of the verse he continued this thought, 'and take my life in my hands?'

Here we find a lack of trust. Job seemed to be thinking exclusively of God's holiness and omnipotence, not His favour. This certainly is related to Job's own conviction that his misery proved the absence of God's favour. We must not forget that Job was greatly impressed by God's greatness; -it is an impression that we would do well to emulate, especially in our sermonizing about the love of Jesus, where that aspect can easily be ignored, leaving us with a false witness.

Job wanted to justify himself before God. He wanted to establish that he was guiltless and blameless, something his friends had blatantly disregarded. Job knew that his self-

³² The Dutch has 'shields' instead of 'defences' in the NIV

justification in fact called God to account and he was well aware of his possible indiscretion. Those who understand the book of Job as a portrayal of 'the self-justification of God' have an insightful appreciation of its message.³³ Even if it does not include the whole picture it is a good beginning. We could expand on this by pointing out that Job would not have learned his lesson until he recognized a coincidence between the self-justification of God and his own self-justification. This wonderful insight still eluded him but he was getting closer. For he said, 'Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;'(13:15).

Never before had Job attained such a level of knowledge of God. And at this time he was again spurred on in his search for faith by the irritant of the injustice which his friends inflicted on him. There is a strange irony in this situation. The foolish theological views for which the friends were rebuked became the very means by which Job made his ascent to God's throne. Without denying that God might claim his life for his brazen request, a small kindling of faith broke through allowing him to say, '...yet will I hope in him;'(13:15b).

We must realize that in the time of Job the awareness of life continuing after death was still quite vague. Job was one of the few people of the Old Testament whose vision went further. We see an element of this in the words, 'Though he slay me, *yet* will I hope in him'. Those under the old covenant valued their life in the flesh and viewed death with horror. They had a much less focussed vision regarding the imperishable character of human life. Hezekiah said, 'For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living- they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness.'³⁴ Under the old covenant this view was common: people did not see much beyond life in the flesh. Even in this book Job held such a view. But he also got beyond it. From the words of Hezekiah we understand that the difficulty of which he complained was that he would be removed from covenant history; and his complaint was valid. 'I will not again see the Lord, the Lord in the land of the living.'³⁵ We may note a remarkable similarity between the prayer of Hezekiah and the book of Job. Compare the following lament of Isaiah 38:12b and 13a, 'day and night you made an end of me, I waited patiently till dawn' with Job 7:4; and also compare Isaiah 38:13b, 'But like a Lion he broke all my bones' with Job 10:16.

We must distinguish two different yet related aspects of our expectation of the future. One of them is expressed in the confession of the resurrection of the body; and we will see later that Job did reach this conclusion. The other aspect reflects an awareness of our place in history.

³³ Dr.Sietsma: De Zelfrechtvaardiging Gods. No other details are given.

³⁴ See Isaiah 38:18,19

The confession of the resurrection of the body has come to full expression in the Christian church. But the church has almost totally ignored human development in the course of history. Hezekiah knew that death is so terrible precisely because it removes us from the history of the covenant. But the Christian tradition has virtually accepted this withdrawal from the course of historical development; by taking death to be ‘normal’, it has not realized the implications for our confession of the resurrection of the body. The confession, thus undermined, has been almost totally destroyed by the school of Barthian theology.

The church must confess both; it cannot choose between confessing the resurrection of the body and the imperishable character of time and history. Yet as we make this double confession we also confess our ignorance as to *how* the resurrection of the flesh must be understood and *how* God will maintain the imperishable character of time and history. Like all the marvellous deeds of God, these too are inscrutable and these two parts of our confession certainly confront us with a mystery. We are assured *that* we will have such a future but we know nothing of *how* it will come about.

Job continued to grow in faith. Immediately after the assurance, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him’, Job boldly confessed, ‘Indeed, this might turn out for my deliverance!’ Note the opening words, ‘even though he might kill me!’ Job had never gone that far.

But in what followed, Job’s weakness came back.

³⁵ See Isa 38:11

18. Job Called the Lord to Account (Ch. 13:20-14:22)

Was Job impertinent in calling the Lord to account? In answering this there are two aspects to be considered. First, Job was convinced that his misery reflected the absence of God's favour. He accepted his suffering and brokenness, his unspeakable sorrow and poverty as an unambiguous sign of God's rejection. Secondly, Job was simultaneously aware that his calling God to account was as unavoidable as it was impermissible. Unavoidable, because God could not just abandon this case. Impermissible, for who among humans can argue with his Maker? Job had not yet seen that there may be a point at which the self-justification of God and the justification of Job, for that matter, of you and me, completely coincide. Only when God had spoken to him *from out of the storm*, did he recognize this (38:1). *Then* he suddenly saw the whole picture. Then he also recognized that his faithful and pious religion had centred on what was only a rumour about God; once he had seen the true righteousness of God, then the Lord also appeared to him like a friend, "...now my eyes have seen you"(42:5).

"I know I will be vindicated"(13:18).

You can't talk like that!

And yet, every believer, no matter how feeble, must repeat this after Job because every believer gets involved in a court case where his person is to be justified. We know all about the justification of the *sinner*; but we must not neglect the justification of the *person*. That is the justification of God for us.

Job *knew* that he would be vindicated, if the Lord did two things. He had to withdraw his hand far from Job, and He had to stop frightening him with His terrors (see vs 21). Then Job was to be given the opportunity to speak. "Summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply."(vs22)

Sometimes we speak of the impudence of faith. Moses said, "Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people?"³⁶ Job called God to account and said, "...why do you consider me your enemy?"(vs 24). Soon the pious Elihu would also be at his wit's end because of Job's boldness towards God. Similarly, we get uncomfortable and critical when a Christian expresses himself in imprecatory prayer. Nehemiah prayed, "Remember those who tried to intimidate me"³⁷

³⁶ See Exodus 5:22

³⁷ See Nehemiah 6:11-14

“Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priestly office...”.³⁸

The believer is no harmless teddy bear; he is among the most dangerous on the face of the earth, because he has authority to call down fire from heaven over the enemies of God.³⁹ Let us not deceive ourselves with empty talk about “God’s sweet saints”, for a time will come when these saints will pray, “may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.”⁴⁰

Job’s life appears to illustrate a law for growth in faith, beginning with gradual progress, suffering a slight relapse and finally, returning to further growth. But we see no reason to refer to this as ‘law’. Faith and its growth cannot simply be compared to other natural phenomena; a living religion is at the heart of faith. We must take into account the riddle of our *wil*, just as in unbelief we must account for the riddle of *unwillingness*. Sometimes such lack of will is called powerlessness. But with his words, Job showed that he was stuck in his own inadequate faith. The dogma at which he grasped, namely the belief that his sorrow and brokenness revealed the absence of God’s favour, led him to ask, “Will you torment a wind blown leaf?” (vs 25) We have heard this lament from him before, e.g. “What is a man, that you make so much of him?” (7:17), or, “If I have sinned what have I done to you, O watcher of man?” (7:20).

Because Job could only see his pain and poverty as a sign of God’s rejection, he constantly returned to the mood of the imprecatory song, “...I know that you will not hold me innocent.”(8:28), and again, “you make me inherit the sins of my youth.”(13:26). As a sign, his misery could not be separated from what it signified, God’s disfavour. While Job maintained his innocence, he took his boils as a sign of his guilt.

And so Job returned to the lament of the song cursing the day of his birth. At the same time, he lost his vision of the imperishable character of time. The lament of the 14th chapter was less vehement than that of chapter three; his restraint and near exhaustion made this plea more stirring than the earlier words of desperation. He now placed the emphasis entirely on the transitory nature of his life.

There is something odd about the role of Job’s complaint as part of the attempt to call the Lord to account. Yet we can see clearly that after his complaint Job renewed his address to God; then he returned to his lament and later again addressed God. But his complaint became weaker and weaker. The thought of death was overpowering and we may compare chapter 14 with a death struggle. His faith was similarly reduced and his insight into faith shrank along with it.

³⁸ See Neh. 13:29

³⁹ See I King 18:36 ff.

Human life is transitory, like that of a flower; should God pay attention to such a one? Does that make any sense? One cannot expect any human being to be born pure, because the parents are not pure. Even life in the plant kingdom is less transitory than human life, for when a person has breathed his last, he is no more. For one brief moment Job remained occupied with the riddle of 'not-being'.

In our time there are many who toy with the problem of 'nothingness', but few know how dangerous it is and fewer still recognize what kind of death lurks in the speculation that all things will lose their colour, become transparent and then - nothing. Today we hear endlessly that 'angst' comes from 'nothing' and from 'nowhere' and therein lies the riddle of 'angst'.

Job also toyed with such poisonous thoughts. There was some truth in his rambling; and we must not forget that even John the Baptist had problems with those kind of questions.⁴¹ Nor should we assume that *we* have solved this problem, for that would be a terrible mistake. Job did not really doubt the imperishable nature of the world but he was confronted with a puzzling question: where was a person when he has breathed his last. The dead did not wake up from their sleep and Job added that they would not awaken before the heavens were no more.(14:12) Some have read in this statement a fleeting recognition of the renewal of heaven and earth, but it seems more likely that Job was simply affirming that the dead would never rise again. We observe Job gradually letting go of what he had just discovered; his hand became lifeless and had no strength. He struggled toward a confession regarding the resurrection of the body but failed in his attempts. For one brief moment his hope was kindled anew. "If a man dies, will he live again?(vs 14) *Then* he would have hope in spite of his misery. "You will call and I will answer you;"(vs 15) then everything would be straightened out. "...you will... not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag."(vs 16b,17a)

But this momentary flicker of hope passed; his suffering overwhelmed him: "...as a mountain erodes and crumbles, and as a rock is moved from its place, as water wears away stones and torrents wash away soil, so you destroy man's hope."(14:18,19). For man goes to his death; he must make his exit from the process of history, even without knowing what becomes of his children. "The dead know nothing", the Preacher affirms,⁴² albeit for different reasons and in different circumstances. Job had some prescience of the state of death. In the realm of the dead

⁴⁰ See Psalm 35:6

⁴¹ See Matthew 11:3

⁴² See Ecclesiastes 9:5

the body mourned its own decay, while the soul mourned its fate: to be dead!

19. A Brief Review

After this 'first round' in which each of the three friends addresses Job and he answered each of them in turn, we can take a moment to review.

In the speeches of the three friends we have seen friendship gone awry: those who were closest to Job betrayed him. Behind the scene we have seen the discussion between God and Satan, revealing that the true issue here is one of God's interest and His righteousness. This was something which Job did not know; nor could he know it. But the reader must remember it, and does not need to have this story repeated at the end.

God's interest and that of Job were not unrelated. Although Job knew something about that, he nonetheless consistently fell back to the assumption that his misery, a beginning of his impending death, was a sign of the absence of God's favour. Yet he maintained his innocence.

The reader notices that Job's interest is also God's interest, and knows that God Himself made it His business to mind Job's business. Of this too, Job had no clear vision. He was fully aware in his sorrow: he had been cruelly torn away from his former life in the community, in which his possessions, his children and his wife were an integral element. Now his possessions were all gone, his children dead and his wife had begun to speak like a fool.

But his friends came. Sometimes, when marital love has failed, friendship may prove attractive. Job's wife failed precisely because she loved him. The love of friendship can be more wonderful than that of a woman.⁴³ Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar came with the intent of commiserating and comforting Job. Job longed for their friendship and where they fell short he corrected them. Their very presence at his side was significant. For Job had been rejected, had left his house, avoided the city and remained far removed from human companions on a garbage heap.

Job ended many days of silence with a curse on his day of birth. That was how he began his speaking. At the end he came back to his imprecatory song but this time he was dead tired.

The friends reacted to Job's imprecatory song. They could not handle it. They stumbled and fell in their attempt to be friends and almost immediately violated God's law for friendship.

⁴³ See 2 Samuel 1:26

They let their relationship gradually deteriorate into an all too common inhumanity. Yet through their failure Job was driven to stronger faith. The speech of Eliphaz was not unkind but Job indicated his disappointment. He ended his response to Eliphaz with a complaint.

Bildad spoke more forcefully: the breach in friendship had widened. Job answered with some irony and again ended his speech with a complaint to show that he had not changed his mind about the initial imprecatory song.

Zophar's speech was most cutting and Job answered him and his friends with great vehemence. He accused them of foolishness practising an advocacy in which God was insulted. They tried to justify God's actions through twisted reasoning, lies and equivocation. They violated God's holiness and righteousness!

However, Job's third answer also ended with a complaint. He began by reminiscing about the irreversible brevity of human life and ended with the sorrow experienced by those rejected by their community, cast out of their place in history and near to tasting death.

When we recognize the regular pattern of the construction of this first part of the book of Job, we cannot avoid concluding that stylistic composition has influenced the telling of this story. The reader is well served by this; for it is much easier for the reader to establish a religious identity with the man Job by means of poetry than by using the more difficult route of ethical argumentation. If Job's friends failed in this task, how could we hope to accomplish it?

That is why we should not be surprised at the systematic development of the discussion in this book. It is for the benefit of the reader. That is why the friends take turns speaking, one after the other, and why Job is given the opportunity of saying all he wishes, taking more time than any of his friends. This characterizes the style of composition used by the authors of the book. Job is given every opportunity to express his complaint, to call on God in prayer and to plead his cause. But this does not take away the questions which face the reader and demand our attention as the dialogue progresses. What are we to make of the dispute between God and Satan behind these speeches, complaints and prayers? Could Satan possibly be winning this game? The friends have apparently thrown in their lot with the evil one, particularly as they depict a view of God which smacks of idolatry. Job, on the other hand may enjoy momentary triumphs of faith, but each of these is followed by a relapse. Nor does the reader know what to make of the imprecatory song; with growing amazement we discover that Job returns again and again to the words of that curse, even when his faith also reflects periodic growth spurts.

There is no answer yet to the question whether Job will persevere. The second round begins.

II. The Poisoned Friendship

1. The Friends Spoiled Their Mission (Overview)

The friends of Job were given a beautiful assignment, but they blew it! They broke up the friendship and wasted the privilege of a relationship with a man like Job. The behaviour of these friends and the events of their story do occur more often but is nevertheless not all that common. All of us experience critical choices on the road of life. We cannot stand still but are constantly asked to make decisions that may prove to have far-reaching consequences. Job's friends were very close to him. They may even have had, in some ways, a closer relationship with him than his wife. She spoke only briefly with him about his misery. Their conversation was quickly finished; it seems pathetic. Job's wife had only one thing to say and Job has only one answer for her. We may assume that as Job's spouse she came back to her point more than once but we have no further indication of her contribution. Job's only answer for her was that since she was no fool she shouldn't talk like one. Then she disappeared from the stage and was not mentioned again in the remainder of the book, unless we assume that she is alluded to in 42:13 as the mother of the ten children yet to be given to Job. Thus she played only a minor role in the book of Job and we hear her speak only once.

Yet we are not to forget that she was and remained the wife of Job. She alone remained with him throughout. The friends became unfaithful. Not she. She stuck with him. We may regard her as the silent witness of the discussions in which the attitude of the friends steadily deteriorated. If she did not follow all the clever theologizing of the friends, she was none the worse for it. She did see how these learned men tormented her husband. And we surmise that she remained with him to comfort him. We may be sure that Job was thus encouraged by her presence. The discussions may have gone beyond her understanding (and little wonder!) But she could watch him and hold his hand. Although she could not come up with any rhetoric of consolation, she could help him simply by being who she was. (nor does Job 19:17, "My breath is offensive to my wife;" contradict this. Even professional nurses may have to overcome a natural aversion to foul odours before accepting the call of their work. And such a natural dislike does not altogether disappear, although it retreats into the background.)

The assignment of the friends had a much wider scope. They did not stop with one brief

word. They poured out reflective speeches of great profundity. They knew how to speak at length about God and humanity.

They assumed their task and took it on, even if they may not have fully understood it. Their confidence in accepting the task was almost incredible. Perhaps they did understand a little of the 'love of friends which is more wonderful than the love of a woman', but they soon destroyed the calling to exercise that friendship.

The assignment to which Job's friends were called was no mean task. While Satan was busy sifting Job like wheat and the mediator in heaven was busy interceding for Job, his life was moving swiftly forward in spite of his stumbling. His story contributed to the progressive revelation of the Someone Who had not yet been revealed in the flesh but Who was hastening towards the time of His appearance in the world. The friends could not remain on the sidelines of this drama. They had to make a choice, either to march with Job on this road of discovery or to turn against him as his enemies.

They chose the latter and that choice set them on a progressively tenacious downward spiral of grim consequences. They did much damage to their friend and Job was deeply hurt. Nor did he realize that the pain inflicted by his friends contributed to the ultimately triumphant advance, which he shared with his divine Commander. At this point he only observed and felt the hurt. He sensed that the friendship bond was disintegrating.

In this process Job lost three good friends probably without reconciliation, for Job 42:9 portrayed a painful farewell. It would appear that three dejected friends did participate in the ceremony of the burnt offering in which Job saved their lives which they had forfeited. This happened so that they might be exalted along with Job and for Job's sake. The Spirit of grace overflowed and reached beyond Job to inundate those around him and thus also save the lives of these three men.

In the second round of talks we see even more clearly than in the first, how these men forfeited their lives. They became enemies of Job and destroyed the friendship. But that was not even the worst of it. Their task was not limited to its ethical significance: even in relationships in which we are bound morally, religion remains the source of motivation. In the degeneration of the friendship and in the way they tortured their friend, these men abused their neighbour who, like them, was created in the image of God.

If we are to understand the behaviour of the friends we must make a careful distinction between morality and religion. While their attitude towards a suffering friend was unethical, a kernel of godlessness inspired this immoral exercise. It was a very special kind of godlessness, singularly devastating in that it continued to call upon the Name of the Lord.

The friends were on the road towards committing the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is remarkable how quickly an ethical relationship, once it has been touched by godlessness, can deteriorate. We could learn something here. Careful observance will reveal such behaviour even in our own environment. It is not a pleasant experience when a friend, once considered trustworthy like a brother, suddenly shows himself unfaithful. Such unfaithfulness quickly deteriorates and soon develops into a deep chasm. The friend who becomes disloyal is despicable. Psalm 55 speaks of this,

“If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were raising himself up against me,
I could hide from him.
But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
as we walked with the throng to
the house of God. ¹

The friend who has become unfaithful is judged against his former faithfulness. It is perplexing that a trusted person could turn untrustworthy. It is hard to believe because the voice remains the same. It still sounds friendly and concerned but as time goes on, it becomes progressively clearer that instead of a friend we are dealing with an exploiter, as self-serving, calculating human being. His talk about sorrow and pain are only so many idle words. Friends who have become unfaithful are cursed in the Name of the Lord.

“Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the grave,
for evil finds lodging among them.”²

¹ See Psalm 55:12-14

² See Ps. 55:15

2. Eliphaz Slandered the Wisdom of Job (Ch. 15:1-9)

The 15th chapter records the hostile response of Eliphaz the Temanite. We have just heard Job in the 14th chapter, in his answer to Zophar, cry out his heart to God; a cry reduced to soft moaning, a hopeless lament in which finally he complained only of the horror of being dead, yet still feeling the agony of constant biting pain.

It seems that hope itself had died in Job.

We ask ourselves whether or not his friends will open their hearts to such misery. The three friends have called down curses upon themselves as they closed their heart to Job. Certainly it was the easy way out. We ourselves might be tempted like that for we could be affected by such bitter suffering; if we really tried to identify with others in their pain it might also settle deep within our bones and leach out our marrow. We are prone to turn away from the evil that overcomes another person in order to preserve ourselves from similar evil.

It may well be that there was also a sickly element in the bitter complaint of Job. Throughout the ages, human beings have been confronted by the stressful plight of a fellow human being who is deteriorating from within. We need to take distance, is the popular stance, else we too will be dragged down. We distance ourselves by rejecting the other. Let us not forget, however, that it will be noticed even while misery darkens the mind. Any meaningful attempts to help will fail miserably. Contrast that with the courageous work of a front line caregiver who may notice that the diseased body arouses disgust, yet boldly ignores it in order to give the care which reflects the love of God. Love is patient and merciful, not boastful or jealous. Love does not hurt anyone's feelings. It does not seek its own good and does not become resentful.³ The hired helper, the professional caregiver who in the previous Century spoke in terms of 'the mechanics of emotional disturbance' had a different attitude. Without mercy they brazenly destroyed the sensitivities of the ill. Their interaction was on the impersonal level; can we destroy our sickly neighbours any more quickly than by treating them impersonally? Today we no longer talk about the 'mechanics of emotional disturbance'. We now know that earlier schools of thought were filled with 'ignoramus' and that our generation has, of course, achieved a much higher level of wisdom. The question remains however, whether contemporary approaches which are still equally impersonal, have made *any* significant improvement in the care for the infirm.

Of course, even with doubtful methods in patient care, one can still demonstrate real love

³ See I Corinthians 13

towards others. Just as that is possible today, it was also possible in the past. It is also possible that proponents of those methods now considered ridiculous will be exonerated before those who today have access to the the latest theories. What really matters is that we incorporate simple knowledge of human relationships into our work of caring for the sick. That is also asked of those who care for the mentally ill and the aged.

This was also demanded of Job's friends. But it is clear that the friends did not really try to observe simple human niceties. They knew nothing of the impersonal mechanics of human care; at least they had not regressed that far. But they also made little attempt to overcome their revulsion and to reach out with a love that covered all things, believed all things, hoped all things and that tolerated all things. Note that Eliphaz answered Job after his words to Zophar. The friends expressed their solidarity, a solidarity of inhumanity. That characterized all their pious talk and self-serving moralistic theology.

Eliphaz ridiculed Job's wisdom; that was very foolish of him. Proverbs 3:29 tells us, "Do not plot harm against your neighbour, who lives trustfully near you." That is a very good proverb and contains good advice for us and those around us, both to meditate on and to practice. Meditation on the teaching of Scripture is a nearly forgotten practice. Among the Bible readers of previous generations this was a much more common practice. For example, an unemployed person desperately searching for work and meeting with bitter disappointment over and over again, would remind himself of a hymn or Bible passage telling of God's mercy to those who call on Him. With every new setback the message would be reinforced and hope renewed.

Eliphaz forged an evil attack on his neighbour and did not remember any such proverb. He condemned Job's wisdom. According to him Job did not have the wisdom from God but a surrogate wisdom or its opposite. He called Job a fool, and in this context foolishness meant: godlessness. When he used the words, "Would a wise man... fill his belly with the hot east wind?" (15:2) he compared wisdom to food, for wisdom, according to Proverbs 3:8, "will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." But wisdom fulfilled a double function. Job's words were nourishment both for himself and for his listeners. That is why Eliphaz referred to Job's words as worthless food, the wind from the east which brought only dust. With this judgement he condemned Job and declared himself innocent, claiming the right to reject Job's wisdom. Job had corrected his three friends who were supporting one another. Eliphaz found Job's corrections useless and ineffective.

It became clearer through the progress of the discussions, that the speeches were argumentative. Job had to oppose his friends and they became his enemies. They even blamed him for undermining piety and hindering devotion to God (15:4).

This was hitting below the belt! Such reproach was meant to wound Job deeply. In the first round of discussions, Job constantly voiced his complaint, maintaining his innocence and calling on God to do justice. Each time his complaint failed to reach its goal. His bitterness was like that of someone who failed to find a spouse; a bitterness not removed even if they eventually did marry and had children on whom they could bestow their pent-up love. But when children of God fail in their attempt to find God, their bitterness is much greater. The friends who witnessed Job's bitterness ought to have been deeply moved to compassion. Instead it aroused their disgust which moved steadily toward an intensive hatred.

This hatred was revealed by Eliphaz as he continued his onslaught. "Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty"(15:5). Note the cowardice of his attack: whereas Job had declared his innocence his friends were saying that anyone who suffered like Job must be guilty. Therefore Job rejected their accusation daring them to provide the evidence. Then Eliphaz pronounced, "Your own mouth condemns you, not mine; your own lips testify against you."(vs6) There was something Satanic, something of the betrayal of a brother in this unscrupulous evidence. Even more Satanic was the cunning with which Eliphaz himself accused Job of craftiness.(vs5b)

After this he asked if Job might possibly possess the wisdom of God, "Are you the first man ever born? Were you brought forth before the hills?"(vs7) These words appear to refer to the wisdom of a primitive original humanity. By comparison, even Adam was not that wise because he started without having any previous experience and had to obtain all his wisdom from God's revelation. But it is not clear that Eliphaz was here referring to Adam. He may have been thinking of a prehistoric time, an original human being who was created before the hills and in comparison with whom Adam would have been a latecomer, not arriving on the scene until creation was completed. Eliphaz continued in this vein, "Do you listen in on God's council? and "Do you limit wisdom to yourself?"(vs8) From these questions it became clear how far Eliphaz had wandered from God's Word revelation. The idea of an original primitive human which he seemed to have held, was far from scriptural. Eliphaz implied that Job, who did live according to the Word of God, knew nothing of God's counsel. Eliphaz should have recognized that even those who have only a partial understanding of God's revelation, are not ignorant about God's counsel and do participate in the wisdom from on high. Eliphaz came very close to denying God's involvement with Job, thereby slandering the Holy Spirit. The reason was very simple. The friends refused to believe that Job was superior or knew more than they did. It was not Job's intent to give them that message but, in spite of himself, he had to witness to what he believed and his witness implied a judgement on his friends. They were not willing to accept that

judgement.

3. Eliphaz Issued A Judgement Against Job (15:10-35)

The friends would not accept Job as their superior. Nor was that Job's choice. Yet, in the course of their discussions they had to choose, whether to regard Job as inferior to any of them or as superior to all three of them put together. None of the four participants could escape this choice. Later, Job too had to choose.

We might ask, at this point, why Eliphaz took the lead. In both the first and the second series of discussions, he took the initiative and the other friends seemed to agree with this strategy. We must remember that these events were to have taken place when much of God's Word revelation was known also outside the circle of Abraham's descendants. According to Jeremiah 49:7, the wisdom of Teman was proverbial; and we may well regard the figure of Eliphaz the Temanite in this light. The practical, religious wisdom which characterized the Temanites may well have contained a significant element of revelation given by God. But we must also be aware that worldly wisdom had been interwoven with it and received an authority equal to that of God's Word revelation. We may surmise that Eliphaz took the floor first because he had the reputation of being the wisest. Two considerations weaken this assumption. First, it is likely that the two other friends had an equal claim to wisdom; and secondly, we may assume the unspoken rule that the oldest take the lead.

Eliphaz began to talk about old age and treated his subject in a grand style, "the gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father." (vs10) if we assume that Eliphaz was the oldest of the friends and old enough to be Job's father, we must admit that the Temanite had an elegant way of referring to his advanced age. He did not say, "I am older than you", but, "One of us is so old that he could be your father".⁴ By avoiding a self-reference he added powerfully to the authority of his years. It was an approach that could be very effective and, when used with a convincing measure of modesty, could have a devastating effect.

In itself it is not wrong to use one's age as leverage. But, using the authority of old age in a showdown with the truth, is crafty. This was the approach of Eliphaz the Temanite.

"Are God's consolations not enough for you?" (vs 11a), he asked. Eliphaz now combined

⁴ Popma's paraphrase

what he had already said, here and in his first speech, with the words of his friends in their speeches and claimed that this added up to “God’s consolation”. Not that he equated his words with the Word of God but he did imply, also on behalf of Bildad and Zophar, that they had in fact fulfilled their duty of comforting Job in his misery, and claimed as well that God’s Word was given through their consolations. He also had the nerve to refer to the words of his friends as the “words spoken gently to you” (vs 11b).

Sometimes we are amazed to see how the book of Job has retained its relevance for us. The words which followed were as harsh as any of the words of his other friends,

“Why has your heart carried you away,
and why do your eyes flash,
so that you vent your rage against God
and pour out such words from your mouth?”(vss. 12,13)

Then the Temanite confessed that he believed that people *as human beings* all were unclean. He put creatureliness on a level with sinfulness. How could “...one born of woman,..be righteous?”(vs14) We may note here a reference to ritual impurity of which we read in Leviticus 12. After giving birth a woman remained unclean for seven days if she had given birth to a boy and fourteen days if it had been a girl. A further 33 days or 66 days respectively, were prescribed as the period during which she was not allowed to enter the sanctuary. Such views of impurity antedated the Mosaic law. In this respect, Moses codified regulations reflecting what was already common practice among the peoples of that time.⁵ Of course, we may assume that Moses made both a selection *and* correction with respect to these traditions.

It is easy enough for us to say that the laws of Moses no longer have validity for us. But we still need to explain the basis of their validity for the Israelites in Moses’ time. Nor should we regard these purity laws as merely symbolic of moral laws, as the all-embracing category of religious rules. The explanation of Prof. Noordzij directs our attention to the role of ancient beliefs in the demonic. But our understanding can only make headway if we break with the habit of regarding the book of Leviticus and similar passages of the Old Testament as ‘for information only’, lacking in authority. Van Anandel was definitely on the right track with his claim that the Mosaic Laws contain principles which have not lost their validity even today. And Noordzij could have gone further if he had paid more attention to what the Scriptures teach about the demonic.

⁵ For more detail on this issue of ceremonial uncleanness, Popma refers to Dr. A. Noordzij, Korte Verklaring, *Leviticus*, p. 130, as well as Dr. J. van Anandel, Handleidingen bij de Beoefening der Gewijde Geschiedenis, Leeuwarden, 1886, vol.I, pp.110-153

These matters, of course, are now regarded as archaic and unpopular. In our time, if anyone would have the nerve to propose that sexuality in itself be regarded as something unclean, he would immediately be labeled as neurotic. Yet that would be very foolish. Of course there are misdirected concepts of impurity and these can be damaging. But the book of Leviticus has not lost its relevance and it is regrettable that we never hear sermons on it. Christian thinking, specifically Reformational thinking, shows large and peculiar gaps on this subject.

The views of Eliphaz were clearly false. People are not unclean because they are 'born of woman'. But since the Fall this aspect of human life has suffered much from the influence of evil and *that* was the Lord's concern in teaching the Israelites regarding the ceremonial purity laws. We forget such lessons to our own detriment.

Eliphaz had confused creation with the Fall. He even repeated the strange notion that before God, not even the heavens or the realm of the angels were pure. He reflected a pagan view of the world of demons. The Bible teaches clearly that there are both fallen *and* faithful angels. 'Modern' methods of reading the Scriptures may adopt this pagan point of view but then we would no longer read the Bible in such a way that we could understand its message.

According to Eliphaz human beings were 'by nature' corrupt, whether because they were created or 'through sin'. On this ground Eliphaz issued a judgement against Job. His case was a simple one. Job, he said, must not try to maintain his innocence: was he not born of a woman? That made him unclean. Easy! But such a conclusion was just as foolish as the notion that all human beings, inasmuch as they were born of woman, were 'clean'. When Job maintained his innocence in the midst of a semi-pagan people who mixed their half-truths with a variety of lies, he got a full dose of venom directed his way: "...man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water!"(vs16)

Eliphaz continued with his instructions for Job; he prided himself on his possession of the wisdom of the ages, going back to primitive times before the land was overrun with aliens (vs19). He proclaimed a very harsh traditionalism; he was convinced that purity of tradition was the guarantee of truth. But he did not realize that he was mixing up the revelation which had been given by God with that which contradicted it.

In short, the sermon proclaiming judgement on Job went like this: the godless live in fear and perish. To bring home the point he gave an impressive description of the tyrant who even dares to live in ruined cities.(vs28) This reference of Eliphaz touched on a superstition of which we have no further knowledge; but it did nothing to show his deference for God's judgement.

4. Job Reproached His Friends for Their Malevolence (16:1-6)

Job was well aware of the unfaithfulness of his friends. He was also sure that they were on the wrong track but was himself unable to discern the issues as clearly as a present-day Bible believer. He probably was not even aware that the Lord would limit his covenant to one chosen people and thereby gave rise to a much clearer distinction between the wisdom of His revelation and human wisdom. That ignorance also increased his suffering: for he had no clear idea of his own place in the ongoing progress of God's revelation.

"I have heard many things like these", he said, possibly alluding to earlier discussions where the old Eliphaz would present his views, giving ideas which he had now forged into weapons to hurt Job. In earlier days Job might not have found these objectionable. But now he was faced with the hard realities of life and they no longer made sense! The wisdom of Teman was no true wisdom; the highly praised traditions contained no truth.

Job continued talking about their attitude. Do they call themselves friends? He appealed to their conscience and to the bond of friendship. This struck deeper because the friends violated the law for friendship and thereby sinned against the One who made that law. "Miserable comforters are you all!", Job exclaimed in 16:2. Your diatribes do not relieve my suffering but increase my pain.

He asked, "Will your long-winded speeches never end?"(16:3) After that he gave an account of how they had measured up to their obligations as friends. Job's answer revealed that a real battle was being fought, a struggle between the truth and the lie, between God's Word and human notions.

What was the matter with them that they contradicted him like this? He would never have expected this from friends. Job suggested that they, at least, hold to the rule of treating others in the way they would wish to be treated. Had they been in his shoes, sick and poor, while he were healthy and well-off, he too could easily have made such fine-sounding speeches, full of empty words. But that would not have been his response, "But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief".(vs 5) That was after all to be expected among friends.

But he was not sure that they were really hearing him. He could have continued contradicting their thoughts but what good would that have done? It would not have brought him relief. But neither did he find relief in silence.

Yet, Job would attempt this hopeless task.

5. Job's Answer Continued (16:7-14)

When we assume that Job was willing to forego his claim to innocence without losing his attitude of trust, we are faced with the difficult if not impossible task of distinguishing his words as either good or unacceptable. We are then positing the absence of an innocence which God Himself ascribed to Job. On the other hand, if we maintain that in his complaint Job remained blameless, we can hardly avoid the appearance of idolizing him, which would make him into a kind of redeemer. We must, nevertheless, look for our answer in the second option. Job had said things that could make a reader have reservations. Later, he too would be corrected by the Lord, for darkening His counsel with words without knowledge.(38:2) But God also said that Job had spoken well of Him, while the three friends had not(42:7).

That is why we must restrict ourselves to only one point of view. Job was allowed to speak in this way in his particular time and circumstances. Elihu, the fourth friend, would come on the scene later as interpreter for all who find it hard to accept and who raise sound objections to Job's words. We should not forget that Job's own vision was not unlimited. He did not know the content of the prologue in Heaven. His struggle was part of a progress toward a greater insight of faith. Job was a witness to God's revelation. Job was also a very sick man, yet a person who remained righteous and faithful, fearing God and fleeing from evil.

The book of Job does not easily lend itself to a reduction to rules and norms, even though many commentators have tried. But it has not worked and cannot succeed. The man Job was too deeply hurt and his cries of complaint came close to whining.

Repeatedly, we catch Job in what we would call the boldness of faith, an insolence filled with burning love. He cried out in complaint; his complaint became a prayer; and his prayer became a cry that fell completely outside the bounds of what we consider proper and decent in our churches today. If we talk of pleading, we use the wrong word; and if we call it an appeal to God's promises, we forget that Job cried for justice and truth. He was as human as any of us, but in the history of the world there was only one Job.

"Surely O God, you have worn me out." he said to his friends and immediately continued, "you have devastated my entire household"(vs.7). Included here was a reference to his place in the larger community where he had done business and shared public responsibilities. Job had been cast out and was completely alone.

“You have bound me - and it has become a witness;
my gauntness rises up and testifies against me.”(vs.8)

The book of Job, time and again, calls us to deeper insight in our own brokenness. Since the fall, human beings are broken creatures. That is not just a matter of speaking. This brokenness is oppressive because it affects our very being. We sometimes try to describe it in terms of susceptibility to various diseases but that is a fallacy. If we go further and maintain a view of the body as a cloak about our person, our brokenness amounts to nothing more than a worn out garment. But that’s not how it is. Our brokenness is part of our very being. *We* are ourselves the broken ones. We are in ruins; ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’- these are but words.

The following five verses speak about God in the third person. This was no longer really a prayer. Perhaps a number of people had gathered around and Job referred to these scornful onlookers in the verses 9-13. But it was unlikely that such people would have hurt Job, so we should still consider the contents of these verses to apply primarily to the three friends.

Job mentioned God’s anger and was right to do so. He may not have known what Moses did when he spoke of being consumed by God’ anger.⁶ He may not have known much about the world of demons either but he clearly knew at least one thing: that God was Almighty and his anger represented the power behind all human suffering. Job saw that well. Yet, the word ‘opponent’ in vs. 9 is not capitalized, and correctly so, because it is more acceptable to read it as a reference to the friends. They behaved as if they were his enemies. They fastened piercing eyes upon him (vs.9). The faithless friends jeered at him; with their speeches they struck at his cheek (vs.10) and they made a pact against him. Eliphaz supported the positions of Bildad and Zophar and so they were united in opposing him. Job called them evil men, a wicked clan to whom God had delivered him. Pitifully he remembered the peaceful life he used to live,

All was well with me, but he shattered me;
He seized me by the neck and crushed me. (Vs.12)

Like a maddened enemy God was destroying him and Job compared God to a sharpshooter for whom he had become a target (vss.12-14). These were very bold words.

6. Job’s Vision of An Intercessor (16:15-17:2)

⁶ See Deuteronomy 4:24

Just at the moment when he appeared to be completely absorbed in his sorrow, Job unexpectedly drew strength from his weakness. He had put on the clothes of mourning, a sackcloth to cover his skin and spoke of burying his brow in the dust. His eyes were red with weeping and he could hardly see. For all appearances Job had given up. Yet at that very moment new life entered his voice: he announced his innocence. That realization seemed to revive his energy, as he modestly referred to his hands which had been “free of violence”(vs.17a) and to the purity of his prayer.(vs.17b) This we must note well, for it is essential to our understanding of the book of Job; here in chapter 16, Job asserted that his prayer was pure. We may be tempted to take the side of the friends, thereby joining many commentators. But Job knew what he was doing when he said, “my prayer is pure”.

Right after this confession his faith was lifted to new heights,

“O earth, do not cover my blood;
may my cry never be laid to rest!” (vs.18)

With this passage we have reached one of the beautiful highlights in the book of Job. When we read this we realize that Satan must *always* shudder. The impossible is happening before our eyes! The man who had lost everything, riches, honour, children and friends; the man who had to call his godless friends fools because their sermons were like a kick in the teeth; the man who, tired to death, placed his face in the dust, nearly giving Satan the coveted sweet victory; this man now lifted up his head and shouted aloud,

“O earth, do not cover my blood;
may my cry never be laid to rest!”

The meaning was clear. Job was convinced that his blood would be spilled but it was innocent blood. He did not want his blood to be covered so that it would continue to cry to God, not finding rest here on the earth until it had been heard by God in the heavens. No wonder, the devil shuddered when Job spoke this way! He was scared to death, and rightly so!

Through this spontaneous outburst Job’s thoughts were lifted up to heaven. The audacity of his faith reached a new high. Where a moment before he had spoken of his illness rising up before him like an accuser, (vs.8) he now exclaimed,

“Even now my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.” (vs.19)

We may surmise that Job did not know exactly what he was saying. Job did not know that it was *literally* true: the Intercessor, Jesus Christ, who had not yet appeared in the flesh, was

nevertheless active in heaven praying for him. Job did not know because it had not yet been revealed. Yet Job groped towards this revelation in his great need.

A wonderful aspect of faith is revealed here: the salvation that God prepares for us is far beyond our comprehension or imagination and even the angels are amazed by it.⁷ Yet *faith* recognizes its truth. We do need such a high priest interceding for us.⁸ The Christ did have to suffer in this way. This is the Saviour and Mediator spoken of in the Heidelberg Catechism.⁹ Faith has only an inkling but it will be fulfilled through revelation.

Even when his own eyes were dimmed, (vs.16) Job saw Jesus Christ with the eyes of faith, centuries before he came in the flesh. Only the bold confidence of faith could come to such a vision. But the Lord had waited for this moment; there is always joy in heaven when faith begins to see truth and proclaim things that are *definitely* impossible. It's like faith making a hoodlum sing psalms and inspiring you and me to join in. The Bible does tell us a little about what makes God happy. It delights Him when His own created handiwork surprises Him. John saw a great white throne in heaven and Him who sat on it. Around Him were millions of angels, altogether focussed on Him, their Centre. When they observed His happiness with the works of His hands they immediately began to sing their great songs of praise and adoration. It was at the same time childlike and highly exalted.¹⁰

The Job who now began to sink back into sorrow was a changed man. He said, "Surely mockers surround me" (17:2a) - answering Eliphaz' condemnation and giving an answer which could yet have proven his undoing, - "my eyes pour out tears to God;"(16:20). This sounds rather hopeless again, but let us not be mistaken, for his eyes poured out tears to God so that God might do justice to the one who opposed God Himself. Here again we note the insolence of faith: God is to justify us against Himself.

7. The Vision Dims Again

(17:1-16)

Job's newfound hope did not inspire him for long: realizing his illness he thought only that he would soon die.

⁷ See I Peter 1:12

⁸ See Hebrews 7:26

⁹ See Lord's Day 5, question and answer #15

¹⁰ See Revelation 5:11; 7:11&12

“My spirit is broken,
my days are cut short,
the grave awaits me.” (17:1)

His few short years had gone and he was on the path of no return. That was why God’s help had to come soon. His life was broken, his days were dark and his grave was ready. His only friends scorned him and argued with him instead of comforting him as was to be expected from friends.

Job continued his prayer,
“Give me O God, the pledge you demand.
Who else will put up security for me?” (17:3)

Job had not forgotten his earlier vision but it was not much more to him than an intimation of faith; the reality of his situation was too clearly before him. Who was to defend him? His friends? Certainly not, for they had shown their intentions. Job pronounced God’s judgement on them when he said,

“You have closed their minds to understanding,
therefore you will not let them triumph.” (17:4)

He compared his friends to mercenaries who would accuse their friends for a price. The friends of Job, too, were selfish and calculating. It was not money they wanted; they were probably rich enough. They wanted the fame of wisdom and would gladly have sacrificed Job on that altar: that wouldn’t have hurt *them*! The desire for fame is no less an evil than the desire for money, and both are based on the desire for power. Each of Job’s friends was a man of the world, a man who knew it all. Their speeches amounted to grandstanding. We too know the types, men consumed by their desire for fame and power. Don’t ruffle their feathers or they turn into poisonous snakes. Job knew the judgement that awaited them: “the eyes of his children will fail” (17:5b)¹¹

These were the facts as Job saw them:

God had hit him so hard that his name had become a byword; that was why his friends despised and hated him and spat in his face. He could hardly see anymore and his body wasted away. All those who lived righteously before the Lord would be appalled and the innocent among the people would be outraged about the godlessness of the friends. The innocent would not be confused by his words but, instead, their faith would be strengthened by his words. (c.f. Job

¹¹ A proverbial statement which meant that his children would come to ruin. (Beknopt Commentaar op de Bijbel, Kok, Kampen, 1963 p. 396).

17:6-9)

We should note the luster in Job's words. He was no longer engrossed in himself and his misery. The thought of an intercessor had encouraged him. He still regarded death as imminent but carefully reflected on the impact of his words. He also thought about those wise friends and their awful behaviour. It was not his intent to hurt them but what he said to them meant death to their boastful vanity. They were not about to forgive him for what he said next,

“But come on, all of you, try again!

I will not find a wise man among you.” (vs.10)

That was hard to take for those who knew it all. But Job had already turned from addressing them. He was more reflective when he continued,

“My days have passed, my plans are shattered,
and so are the desires of my heart.”(vs 11)

Then he talked *about* those wise friends,

“These men turn night into day;
in the face of darkness, they say,
'Light is near'.” (11,12)

It was all talk; did they really believe that their words could take away the reality of darkness?

When Job was going down to the grave, what hope could their nonsense give him? What would happen, instead, was that hope would go down to death with him! He didn't expect anything from such friends. They were proud and important, all three of them; men who knew it all. They talked about ancient wisdom, untainted traditions and the knowledge of long gone generations. What a pathetic lot!

Job's vision was dimmed but not gone. Just as before, Job's revival of faith slackened off again. It seemed to have a certain rhythm. May we say that he was unable to maintain faith as a possession, that he had let go of the vision of faith already attained? I don't know. We must remember that Job was anticipating things that had not yet been revealed. And he kept both feet on the ground. Job had derived new energy from the thought of the intercessor in heaven. He did not completely lose the comfort that he had attained in the boldness of faith.

But he had also deeply insulted his friends by calling them fools; they had betrayed him just as those who know it all always betray their friends. They were not going to let him forget it!

8. Bildad Lashed Out Against Job **(Ch.18)**

Bildad had long ago forgotten his responsibility as a 'friend'. He only thought about the fame of his wisdom. He called Job's words 'clever fabrications',¹² and declared that he did not want to continue the discussion in this way. The betrayal of the friends became more and more evident. Bildad reproached Job for taking the lead in the discussion, a lead which they, his friends, wanted to maintain. There was something inhumane in his attitude. Job was no longer important to Bildad, nor did his suffering concern him. Yet Job was to submit to their wishes. They were, after all, the wise men, weren't they? Acknowledgement of their superiority would allow progress in the discussion.

Bildad should have concluded his speech at this point, to see whether Job would have agreed to that request but he was still too enamoured with his own importance and continued, "Why are we regarded as cattle?" (18:3) This was too much! Sure, Job knew it all and the three friends were stupid. This went too far! Job, of all people, "You who tear yourself to pieces in your anger" (vs 4a). That was what he did to himself. Did he also want to turn the world upside down? (4b)

Bildad firmly understood that Job presented a point of view which differed completely from that of the three friends. This made Job a Revolutionary; he wanted to change the world. For the rule had been: those who did evil would come to disaster, and a person overcome by disaster had done evil. The friends had assumed that this was the law of reality. They did not understand that this was only their view, no more. Once they saw this law of reality, this fact of life, this certainty challenged, they became afraid that the one who challenged their view would go further in shaking the foundations of the world. That was why Bildad said, "is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? Or must the rocks be moved from their place?"(vs 4)

So Bildad regarded Job as one who would depopulate the earth and move the rocks from their place. What was more reliable than the earth? And he wanted to turn it upside down. Surely such views had to be rejected.

We must stop a moment to regard the situation from the point of view of the friends. To be sure, they had used lies to cover the gaps in their theology as Job had pointed out.(13:4-12) They themselves believed what they were saying; could one imagine them lying on purpose? And, the more they talked the more they became set in their misleading convictions. They even used a touch of kindness. Even those who cheated and acted unjustly could sound convincing and concerned. They were gentle and humane, using soothing words. However, Bildad

¹² The closest English translation I could find was the RSV which has, 'hunt for words' (see 18:1) JVM

continued, people like Job should use their brains and avoid defending positions none had ever heard of before. Against such a position he might have expected their opposition, repudiation and, finally, they would have ended up ignoring him. What else could they do? How could anyone have the nerve to oppose the wisdom of hoary antiquity?

Nor would all Job's talk help him for the iron-clad laws of this world would not be changed to please him. One of these unchanging laws went as follows: the godless will definitely be destroyed, and those who are destroyed are godless.

We should note that when people believe in rigid laws for human life, they have abandoned belief in a God who is sovereign in doing His good pleasure. They might believe in god of Chance but not in a God who is sovereign and omnipotent. They do not believe that God transcends His own laws. They are not like children who do understand that God can cry over our suffering and be so happy about our faith, that the obedient angels, "whose pleasure it is to serve His every whim"¹³ break out with exalted songs of praise.

The friends were both very wise and old beyond their years. They were unfamiliar with the youthfulness of a renewed life. The boldness of faith was an abomination to them. They

were fossilized in the wretched death of their orthodoxy.¹⁴ The poet of this eighteenth chapter gave Bildad his full measure. The man of heartless wisdom spoke his mind. The wise man who relied on what came out of his own heart, even when it was mixed in with revelation from on high, got to sing his song! And Bildad sang his song of the destruction of the godless,

"The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out;
the flame of his fire stops burning.
The light in his tent becomes dark;
the lamp beside him goes out.
The vigour of his step is weakened;
his own schemes throw him down.
His feet thrust him into a net
and he wanders into its mesh.
A trap seizes him by the heel;
a snare holds him fast." (18:5-9)

Bildad compared the godless with hunted game. Like Eliphaz in 15:16, he projected a

¹³ Psalm 103:20; Popma's quote is from Ps 103, stanza 11 in the Dutch Psalter

¹⁴ I would like to say 'orthodoxisticism' to reflect Popma's own creation: 'ellendige *orthodoxistische* dood'

poisonous personal hatred in his lyrics; the author of this chapter reflected his merciless attack as he made a mean insinuation regarding Job's illness,

“Calamity is hungry for him;
disaster is ready for him when he falls.
It eats away parts of his skin;
death's firstborn devour his limbs”. (18:13)

It was a brief description of the leprosy, which Job believed would kill him. This verse spouted pure hatred. Verse 15, too, may have referred to his illness,

“Fire resides in his tent; burning sulphur
is scattered over his dwelling. (vs 15)

This text may have referred to the disinfectant needed to purify the area where a leper lived. After a few pointed hints regarding the ultimate end of the godless, which Bildad obviously directed at Job, he reached the general conclusion,

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

‘Who knows not God’? Bildad was making a judgement that God would not recognize Job because he maintained the justice of his cause, assured in God's promise. Bildad was not impressed with Job's call for an intercessor; for him it was a phantom idea. He was irritated by one of the earliest prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. For even then the Messiah was, “...destined to cause the falling and rising of many...”¹⁵ For Job it would mean his vindication, but for the friends whose hatred grew from bad to worse, it would mean their downfall. We marvel that, by God's grace, Job would soon be interceding in prayer for these friends.

9. Job's Grief Over the Hatred of His Friends

(19:1-19)

When Bildad had spouted his venom against Job, Job's answer took on a completely different tone. He recognized how poorly his friends were treating him yet he longed for their friendship.

How could they act this way? How much longer could they grieve him with their speeches that broke his heart? This was inhumane and nearly impossible. Should a friend treat another

¹⁵ See Luke 2:34

friend that way?

It is remarkable how corrupt religion can totally destroy morality. Those who suppress faith and harden their heart become inhumane even to their best friend; we see how quickly moral decay can set in.

There was no end to their attack and that dismayed Job. “Ten times now you have reproached me” (19:3). While you were hurting me and your words pierced me like needles, you had no sense of shame about attacking me. This was an unimaginable evil; could his friends attack him as if it were a game? Did they really believe that he walked on the road to destruction? Didn’t they know him anymore? Had he become such a stranger? Where were their brains?

If then they were determined to issue judgement against Job from their exalted perch, they should have done it for good reasons. Their course was weak for they had no proof. They should have stuck to the facts! Was it true or not that God treated Job unjustly and “has drawn his net around me” (vs 6) as if he were an animal?

Here Job showed himself to be the greatest opponent of one of the most perverse forms of unbelief, a faith that grovels before God in false humility. It is most important to distinguish the matter clearly. Anyone can say: ‘Whatever God does is well done.’ But this could also turn into an expression of unbelief. ‘Make it up with God’, the friends advised Job, ‘for you can’t resist Him.’ But Job accused his friends indignantly for representing God like lawyers in a bad case and, in this way, insulted God.

One can insult God by mumbling, ‘whatever God does is well done’; one can reject God by insisting that he never makes mistakes, even though it is of course true that everything God does is well done and he never makes mistakes. But when we turn these truths into abstractions we have also turned our God into an abstraction and that is an act of unbelief. We have then reduced God to a concept, a mechanism of inerrancy, a ‘do-it-right-every-time’ machine. It is better to conclude that God has made at least one mistake; at least once has done something that should not have happened, even as we realize that such a notion is ultimately not tenable.

This last conclusion was the one that Job had chosen, upsetting the orthodoxy of his friends. He took his heart in hand. He trod the path of an insolent faith. By walking that road he would be reprimanded by the Lord for speaking “words without knowledge” (38:2). But to the self righteous Eliphaz He would say,

“I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” (42:7)

We can’t possibly reduce this to a theory. How can we theorize about the impossible? We

cannot imprison the Lord because of His ‘well-doing’ and ‘inerrancy’ role. But those who say that that is impossible because God is the Living God, are also busy making a golden calf for themselves.¹⁶

Job cursed his birthday, just like Jeremiah.

Of course, that is not allowed for it is not proper, not orthodox. Job said to God,

“judge me fairly over against God”!

Indeed, every sinner who repents asks God for a just judgement: ‘Give me justice against my adversary’. We may think of the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow.¹⁷ Jesus told this parable to encourage his friends to continue in prayer and not give up. The judge did not fear God nor did he care for people; the widow came back to him time and again and said,

“Grant me justice against my adversary.”¹⁸

In the end he agreed to grant her justice for she might have gone so far as to hit him in the face,

“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”¹⁹

Or only grovelling? *That* is the issue.

The hostile, the abused, the casualties, the prostitutes and the disenfranchised, led by a divine light, are all coming to call on God, “grant me justice over against my adversary!” But the friends who knew it all with the wisdom from antiquity, shook their heads. That was not the way it was done! They knew the difference between virtue and vice to a hair’s breadth; they gave a tenth of their dill and cummin;²⁰ they knew all the rules and maintained their meticulous methodologies. But, unless Job prayed and sacrificed on behalf of his friends, they would have fallen under judgement of the Deceiver and been overtaken by death like a loan shark or have descended alive to hell like Korah, Dathan and Abiram.²¹

Faith glories in the demand for justice!

‘Stick to the facts’, Job asserted, ‘don’t you see that God is the one who denied me justice? That God has caught me like an animal in a hunter’s net? I don’t want your kind of orthodoxy

¹⁶ This impossibility which is impossible may need further explanation to be clear to the untrained reader. It is an issue of logic that needs to be elucidated.

¹⁷ See Luke 18:1-8.

¹⁸ Lk 18:3b.

¹⁹ Lk 18:6-8

²⁰ See Matthew 23:23

²¹ See Numbers 16:30; also Jude :11

nor your politically correct wisdom. I am crying aloud at the violence of my abuse but no one hears me. Even God Himself has not come to rescue me.’²²

“He has blocked my way so I cannot pass;
he has shrouded my path in darkness.
He has stripped me of my honour,
and removed the crown from my head” (19:8,9).

‘God has defiled me! He has cut my life short, and uprooted my hope. He raised his anger against me and has treated me as his enemy’.²³

“His troops advance in force;
...and encamp around my tent.” (vs 12)

Job was describing the changed attitude of all those who had been a part of his life. His brothers stayed away from him and his acquaintances became strangers. His kinsmen avoided him. It was strange how quickly friends avoided the house of a person who was in great misery.

“My guests and my maidservants count
me a stranger;
they look upon me as an alien.” (vs 15)

When Job asked his slave for the smallest favour, he did not even bother to answer him. Such arrogance! And if he really needed help he would have to beg repeatedly and receive sloppy and reluctant service.

To be sure Job’s wife stayed with him. But he knew that his bad breath made her sick, and in that she was no different from his kinsmen. She did not leave him but neither could she overcome the repugnance common to all who first experience the stench of illness. We certainly must not underestimate the disgusting nature of Job’s illness

10. Job Saw The Redeemer (19:20-29)

Job 19:20-29 has long been regarded as a climax for its portrayal of the suffering and triumph of Christ. And rightly so! But to understand this passage correctly we must keep our eyes on Job’s factual situation as we observe the prophetic prediction.

First then the factual situation:

²² Popma’s paraphrase of 19:1-7

Job spoke of his illness,

“ I am nothing but skin and bones;
I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth.” (vs 20).²⁴

This reminds us of Psalm 22. In his brokenness, Job cried out for the love of his friends, even though he was aware of the hateful attitude they had towards him.

“Have pity on me, my friends, have pity,
for the hand of God has struck me.” (vs 21)

But while I call upon God to save me from his wrath, you have sided with the God who pursues me, not with my Redeemer.

Job was confident that there was a redeemer, somewhere, somehow! He also knew that his words were not in vain; they were to be preserved. Little did he know that his words *would* be recorded and preserved for many generations to become the basis for one of the most wonderful books of the Bible. He hoped that his words would be captured in script, because written words were and are more enduring than the spoken word. His words deserved to be chronicled. Nor was it enough to just write them down; they needed to be inscribed in lead with an iron tool, preserved forever on a rock. (see vs 23, 24)

All of this pointed to the coming Christ. His skin too would stick to his bones, when His suffering reached its climax. In his deepest distress, he too would beg for the wakeful attention of his friends.

Scholars have drawn a parallel between the ‘Word becoming Flesh’, or incarnation, and the ‘word becoming Written’, or inscripturation. When taken too far, this could lead to absurd speculation. But the parallel is not completely without value. The Word became flesh and the Word became Scripture. The two belong together; but they are also noticeably different.

The Word becoming flesh means, weakness, illness, brokenness, decay. The Word becoming Scripture means, among other things, that the Word has become prophetic word and is more reliable than all our experience.

“I know that my Redeemer lives,” (vs 25a)

It’s as if Job were saying, “My Avenger who will justify me over against my adversaries, lives!”

We have arrived at a high point which had not been reached at any time before in the

²³ Paraphrase of 19:9-11

²⁴ Popma goes on to say that being left only with toothless gums is equal to being near death; it has been said that in losing your teeth you also lose your dignity. Dentists can sometimes carelessly talk about emptying the mouth of teeth (in preparation for dentures) without realizing that this may be experienced as a kind of castration.

progression of revelation experienced in the life of Job. He was still convinced of his destruction, yet he reached out to eternal life with a clarity attained by very few people of the Old Testament. People of the Old Covenant knew the terror and strangeness of death, the departure from the land of the living. We know that history goes on even after our departure from this life, just as it continues in our exalted Saviour. So we are tempted to forget how right Hezekiah was when he considered death as a destruction and a separation from the progress of covenantal history.²⁵ He could not see that history is not held back by death, no more than that the history of the man Jesus stopped when he died. Hezekiah, however, did recognize the horror of death. It is something we are apt to ignore unless we are directly confronted with it ourselves.

Job's awareness of the horror of imminent death matched that of Hezekiah. But Job's task was unique inasmuch as he nonetheless achieved a vision of the enduring nature of his cause, his time and his place in history.

And at this point it was not just an intimation of faith; he spoke with full confidence.

The friends had understood very little of this. Job's words awoke their resentment. Soon Zophar in his second speech would be so rejecting of Job that he, unlike the other two friends, would not give a third speech.

Indeed, Job's words were offensive to them.

What Job had said, that his Avenger would have the last word and that he would appear on the earth, represented impossibility personified, especially for those who believed in ironclad laws for this world,

“And ‘though this body has been destroyed,
then, [apart from]my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes-
I, and not another.”(19: 26,27)²⁶

These two verses in chapter 19 belong to the most loved of passages in the entire Bible. But we must not forget how preposterous they would have sounded in the ears of the friends. In Job's days people realized even better than we do that we *are* our bodies (even though popular philosophies continue to depreciate the role of the body); Job acknowledged that his body would be destroyed; nonetheless he believed that he would see God, even without a body; this was what the friends regarded as nonsense.

For all those who lived under the Old Covenant this must have been equally hard to swallow. Hezekiah spoke quite differently. The message of the book of Job could not achieve its

²⁵ See Isaiah 38: 10-20

full relevance until Christ had been resurrected.

Job claimed that it would certainly happen and that, even when his flesh had been eaten away, he would see God on his side and not as a stranger. To the friends these words were pure nonsense.

Job continued, “My heart is consumed within me.”(KJV19:27c). Job’s longing to see God was all-consuming even if it seemed totally impossible, even if his eyes were destroyed; he longed for this exceedingly.

A very strong reprimand followed his confession. This time Job’s faith did not diminish. He warned his friends to consider that they might be earning a death sentence for themselves with their bitter hatred and persecution, and that,

“You should fear the sword yourselves;
for wrath will bring punishment by the sword,
and then you will know that there is judgment.”(vs29)

11. Zophar’s Last Speech (20:1-29)

“If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,” Job lamented in 9:33; “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” he said in 13:15; “Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high.”(16:19) he declared; and in 19:25 he proclaimed, “I know that my Redeemer lives.” Step by step Job moved along to a clearer confession of the Messiah. And his friends were there to hear it all.

But they were irritated by it! They were satisfied with their own worldly wisdom. They did not need an Avenger; with the wisdom handed down through the ages they could save themselves. Their friendship had turned to bitter hatred.

Zophar certainly heard Job’s threat of God’s judgement and he was not impressed. Did Job think he was really going to expose the three wise friends to judgement? That would be turning the world upside down! Then Zophar who was rather genial at first (11;17-20) became furious and admitted , “ I am greatly disturbed”(20:2).

Why was Zophar bursting with anger? Because he heard “a rebuke that dishonours “(vs3) him. That was intolerable! He, Zophar, sound in body and mind, was being corrected and

²⁶ Note: the translation given in the NIV footnotes for vs 26 is used here.

warned by Job, that nearly dead, sickly, pain-stricken reprobate! That went too far! So Zophar prepared himself to deliver a final kick to the man who was already down.

Although Zophar demonstrated a rather despicable dehumanizing attitude, that is not uncommon among sinful, fallen people. It is all too easy to give a final shove to those who are weak and on their last leg, to snuff out the smouldering wick, to break the fallen reed, to destroy what is sickly and to bulldoze to the ground whatever is feeble.

God is full of mercy, but humans, weakened by their fallen state, are often cruel and heartless. People were not created to be so merciless but have become that way through the fall. Even little children can already show such cruelty; folly takes root in the heart of the young. Those who want to practise kindness must seek to overcome their hardheartedness through repentance before they can exercise a 'love that endures all things'.²⁷ Unless they face the need for repentance they will not get beyond the mercy of the godless which is, as often as not, just another form of cruelty.

Mercilessly, Satan was driving Zophar on the path of injustice. While he oozed with sweet, pious language, Zophar jeered at Job, referring to him as a spirit without insight.(20:3)²⁸

Then Zophar asked,

“Do you not know this from of old,
since man was placed upon the earth?” (20:4; RSV)

Zophar reverted to primitive, ancient wisdom, much like Eliphaz in 15:7and 8,

“Are you the first man ever born?
Were you brought forth before the hills?
Do you listen in on God’s council?
Do you limit wisdom to yourself?”

The similarity is very obvious: Eliphaz, Zophar and the Lord Himself asked Job about the origin of wisdom, the knowledge that had its source beyond the boundaries of the creation. The wisdom of God could only be found in God’s council; that was what Eliphaz alluded to in 15:8. The original wisdom, which we need to recognize the earth as a creation, is wisdom from on high, based on the deliberations of God’s council regarding creation. Eliphaz claimed wisdom from that source but, in fact, in 15:7 he ascribed such wisdom to the original and primitive human being. He claimed the wisdom of his ancestors, possessed by them many ages ago and transmitted, at least in some situations, with a degree of purity. We can at other times find traces

²⁷ I Corinthians 13

²⁸ In the Dutch NV, vs 3b reads, “maar geest zonder inzicht gaf mij antwoord” which is the opposite of most English translations including the NIV, “I hear a rebuke that dishonors me...,”

of a wisdom preserved from very ancient times, which is nevertheless human wisdom, the wisdom of the patriarchs from a time when “no alien passed among them”(15:19)

Such human wisdom the Apostle James called, “earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.”²⁹ This was the kind of wisdom that led Eliphaz to say that human impurity was derived from creatureliness or even from birth; he practically identified creation with the fall.

But even Job, though far ahead of his contemporaries and ahead of others in the Old Testament, was yet in some ways no further than them in his view of such primitive wisdom. Although it seems strange that becomes clear from God’s correction in 38:2,

“ Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?”

Job’s life rested on genuine knowledge of God’s revelation and even served through suffering to push ahead the boundaries of that knowledge. But he remained only human in spite of all his blamelessness. He did not fall into the sins of those who turned God into a concept, a mechanism of inerrancy or a ‘do-it-right-every-time’ machine. Job always honoured the Lord as a living God. Maybe he did not realize sufficiently that God’s counsel would in a certain sense always remain God’s secret. Even while his heart burned with love and longing for justice did he, in fact, fail to remember that God’s counsel was indeed the counsel of *God*? We may have been trying to avoid judging Job in order to avoid standing on the side of the deceiving friends. Rather, we have been trying to understand Job as one who made progress in revelation knowledge, while nevertheless remaining completely human in his brokenness; (with the added light of the New Testament we might even be succeeding in such an attempt). Our goal is to understand how Job, who maintained his innocence, finally had to admit, “I put my hand over my mouth” (40:4), and even, “therefore, I despise myself³⁰ and repent in dust and ashes.”(42:6)

Throughout the ages people have tried to rationalize faith; when at last they discovered that it cannot be done, they rationalize the discovery of that impossibility, so that they can still maintain the ideal of logical control over the *knowledge* of God, if not God Himself. Job had said repeatedly that God opposed him as an enemy and with the persistence of the poor widow he had demanded justice. Not that he ascribed injustice to God but something in his attitude indicated his assumption, ‘This one time you have made a mistake, Lord.’ And even though this may have been preferable to the theology of the friends and, for Job in his suffering it may have been the

²⁹ See James 3:15

³⁰Popma wanted to translate ‘to despise myself’ with ‘I nullify my previous opinions’

only option, yet, when confronted with his lack of understanding he readily responded with a firm 'Amen'. In the final analysis he was willing to recant.

In spite of the Lord's reproach and Job's self-correction, he was still identified as the man who spoke right of God, contrary to the friends who had earned their death with their contemptible theology.

When the Lord asked Job about the origin of wisdom, he pointed to something entirely different from that implied by Eliphaz' question about the origin of wisdom. Eliphaz, with all his piety, referred to human wisdom based on his ancestors; God referred to wisdom from on high. Zophar did not even bring up such pious phrases, "Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth" (20:4). He alluded to original primitive wisdom which from the beginning had remained a human possession, thereby denying that human beings came on the earth without knowledge, and from day one depended on God's self-revelation for their very survival.

The idea that we can know anything "by nature" or "in and of ourselves" is a very stubborn notion. It presents a strong temptation. We meet it in all kinds of forms, whether in the claim that human beings enter the world remembering knowledge acquired earlier, or through visions of ideas from a pre-existent life. Or, perhaps, they entered the world with innate knowledge, with ideas which are as much part of themselves as blood. A less blatant form of this view presses the source to a background lost in the earliest stages of the acquisition of knowledge; one might even claim, piously, that God Himself has written this knowledge on our hearts or that the Holy Spirit witnesses to it. With even greater piety, one may suggest that human beings possess this inborn knowledge as a gift of creation before the Fall and have lost it with the Fall into sin. Even then, however, a basic kernel of faith regarding inborn human knowledge is maintained. And such original inborn knowledge remains a significant obstacle to recognition of the Word Revelation as complete, pure and received from above. Knowledge of Revelation is then reduced to "additional information" rather than the foundational knowledge which makes all other knowing possible.

Job never regarded revelation as a supplement. For him the Word was always foundational. But he may at times have neglected to maintain the Word Revelation as the foundation of his life. This also applies to the knowledge of faith obtained by a Christian. It remains foundational, which is to say that it forms the ground or basis for all our knowledge even after we have heard it a hundred times. Time and again, we have to obtain it from the Lord. We may never assume that we can cling to such knowledge as our possession in such a way that we can draw our own conclusions from it and assume these to be part of God's revelation.

Zophar reproached Job for neglecting that original, earthly human knowledge. That was why he talked so foolishly. But Job never put his trust in such primitive earthborn knowledge. He had always looked towards the knowledge from above. That's why he was able to expand his understanding even without being conscious of it. However, he may have been somewhat overly bold in taking ownership of such wisdom and, for that reason, was said to have darkened God's counsel without understanding.

But he kept his distance from the earthly wisdom of his friends. Such wisdom was worldly, unspiritual and demonic. It was therefore totally lacking in mercy and grace. Armed with such knowledge, it was no wonder that the friends neglected friendship and violated the law for friendship. Job himself said so in 6:14, "He who withholds kindness from a friend, forsakes the fear of the Almighty."(RSV). It is a golden rule, a fitting guide for action in any situation or calling. In the bonds of friendship we share our lives regardless of pain or struggle because ethical constraints apply particularly in such relationships. The law for friendship requires different, and at times has greater demands than the law for marriage. In its own way it demands total surrender of self interest. We pray for our friends when they are sick or well. If our friends neglect their duty we remind them of the rule in Job 6:14 which warns against forsaking the fear of the Almighty and, when they incline towards unfaithfulness we may invoke the curse of betrayal from Psalm 55.

Then Zophar, having completely chucked out God's claims for friendship, began preaching about the ruin of the godless. It was a grand sermon and the poet did not shortchange Zophar's contribution. Yet we shudder a little: where did the composer get the nerve to put such words in Zophar's mouth? Anyone who reads chapter 20 aloud in the course of family devotions without giving further explanations of these words, has not done justice to the Word of God. Quite the contrary!

12. Job Calls His Friends to Repentance (21:1-5)

The book of Job contains a lot more action than we might think initially. Indeed, as drama it is like a play meant to be read or heard rather than seen, but it does show clear character development. Job advanced step by step and his friends also show development - but in the hardening their hearts.

Job accused his friends of a foolishness which is not far from godlessness, of using lies to

plaster over the truth (13:4) and he threatened them with the sword of God's justice (19:29). He had urged them to come to their senses (6:29) and begged them to show a little compassion (19:21).

But the friends continued to harden their hearts. They had shamefully abused their responsibility as friends. They had called Job a fool and attacked a helpless dying man with poisoned darts of cruel accusations (15:16b; 21:3b).

Job differed from them in that, despite his strongly worded corrections, he continued to love his friends. He longed for a sign of concern and some evidence of friendship. But they had closed their hearts to him and revealed the conceited attitude of the self-righteous. Their kindness only served their own vanity. They took pride in the patience they had shown towards the fool. But in fact they were no longer his friends. They had broken faith with him and were ever more clearly revealing their hatred for Job, a hatred with deep religious roots. They found Job's judgement on their human wisdom abhorrent; their biting comments fell on Job as death blows.

Anyone who understands the meaning of the promise to Eve in Genesis 3, where God announces the enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent as His way of showing mercy on his creation, will not be surprised at the hatred which developed. Job and his friends were engaged in a religious struggle. In the course of such a fight any who belong to Christ will inevitably reach the moment at which they say,

“Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord,
and abhor those who rise up against you?
I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.”³¹

The difference between the Old and the New Testament has little relevance for this exclamation because in both dispensations the antithesis is the same. Nor does it relate to the so-called 'spiritually enlightened' moments in the life of the believer, for the antithesis or struggle between the serpent's seed and that of the woman involves every moment of the Christian life. However, there are critical moments for this religious hatred and the book of Job witnesses to that. Later, on God's orders, Job was allowed to pray for his unfaithful friends. He prayed for those who had done him violence and blessed those who cursed him.

The command “Love your neighbour as yourself” does not have unlimited validity. Those who believe in Christ must in the final analysis share with Christ the hatred he holds for His

³¹ Psalm 139:21

enemies. Yet He prayed for the transgressors. The test on our practice of hatred is apparently given with the demand that it may not be aroused against those who hate Him until their hatred is complete. That does not mean that those who are in Christ are to become saccharine sweet. They are fully authorized to identify the violent man, the cheat and the thief for what they are. They have the right to turn away from the false brother who has fallen in love with the present world even when such love is carefully shrouded in orthodoxy.³² They should remember that in the fullness of the present dispensation hatred for the enemies of Christ must not be absent, because then the love for Christ would also lack in meaning.

In the discussions between Job and his friends their hatred had become complete, while his love was still unabated. His answer to Bildad surprises us because of its gentle sadness (Ch 19). The friends appear to have been chased down their path of hatred by a demonic urge while Job, though disgusted by their lies, restrained himself and repeatedly appealed to their heart and conscience. He reached out to them with unexpected kindness. In the discussion Job proved himself to be upright and faithful, God-fearing, fleeing from the evil of unfaithfulness and a hard-hearted attitude; after all, those who would deny sympathy to a friend, have forsaken the fear of the Lord [6:14]. We clearly see here the intimate relationship between the religious demand to love the neighbour and the ethical norm of faithfulness to a friend. By their false religion, the friends ruined the practice of morality. By his faithfulness to the Law of God, Job constantly renewed his respect for the Divine Law for friendship. That was why, when Job called his friends to remember their faithfulness as friends, he was calling them to repent. In the first few verses of chapter 21 he called them with so much tenderness and compassion, that it should have mellowed them, if it had not been for the hardness of their hearts. He asked the absolute minimum of them. They did not listen very well. Now he asked them once again to pay attention and listen carefully to him; that was the very least he could expect from them. But he would even be willing to accept this absolute minimum as the full measure of their proof of friendship. They should have comforted him but they didn't get that far. Alright, as long as they would listen to him now, "Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation you give me." (21:2)

He was asking for a little patience for himself. Could someone as beaten down as Job not demand a little patience? That should not have been too much to ask."Bear with me, while I speak, and after I have spoken, mock on"(vs3). This last comment reflected a degree of bitterness. Could it, perhaps have reflected a friendly irony, based on the reality of the situation? They themselves knew that they had mocked him. But he would not take it ill of them if, for once,

they would listen. It is possible that he also meant: ‘if you really listen, even if only once, you will not want to mock me anymore.’

Job’s speech showed that he didn’t really understand why they had to get so angry with him. Had he insulted them, addressed his complaint to them or accused them of causing his pain and the injustice that held him like a vise? He found it strange that they should be so upset. They knew very well that his dispute was with God. They had not been appointed to intervene on His behalf; that much was clear from the fact that they could not defend Him rightly. All they could come up with in God’s defense was a set of messy arguments. As if God needed that! “Look at me”(vs 5), said Job and this rather friendly request contained a reproach for, in fact, the friends had turned away from him in disgust. They had cloaked themselves so thoroughly in their opinionated homegrown views that they ceased to see Job as their friend. That’s the worst part of worldly wisdom, namely that it blinds us to our surroundings and even to our neighbours and friends. Those who practise human wisdom often turn their human surroundings into a business affair; fellow human beings are seen as objects. Eliphaz Bildad and Zophar regarded Job as a thing, an irritating obstacle in their path that needed to be kicked aside. Job pleaded, “Turn to me and you will be horrified” and then you will not want to say anything more. Didn’t they see how bad the situation was? How blind they were? If they would just have looked at him as a friend, a real friend, with real compassion, they would not have dared to say anything else. Then they would have clapped their hand over their mouth.[see vs 5b] Then they would have realized how terrible the situation was and would have spared Job their empty talk.

Every time he stopped to think about his situation, he recognized how bad it was; It overwhelmed him; he could hardly believe that things could get this bad.

With these last words, as Job witnessed to his own situation, he inevitably identified with his friends. As much as possible he restored the broken bond. He did that by telling them how awful he felt about his situation. This announcement would have had no meaning had it not been given in faith, working toward the restoration of the old relationship and healing of the poisoned trust.

We shall see later that Job’s call for repentance did indeed have some effect.

13. Job's Reflection on the Prosperity of the Godless (21:6-21)

With some confidence that the bond of friendship had been somewhat repaired, Job calmly continued to reflect on a past rich with experience. We may have been imagining Job as a patriarch living in a peaceful isolation, far from the city, with his wife, children and many servants. But that picture is incorrect. Chapter 29 indicates that Job had been concerned with the plight of the widows, the poor and the oppressed, that he mingled with high-ranking city officials and frequented the courts to negotiate justice for otherwise unknown people. Job was not a recluse. He was familiar and involved with his time, his city and political affairs.

Job lived in a time when knowledge of God was still commonly known, at least inasmuch as it had been revealed. But that period was coming to an end. Job was a contemporary or near-contemporary of Abraham. He was living in a period of transition from a more universal application of revelation and covenant to one characterized by a more 'particular' revelation limited to one people. He was in a position to witness the process of secularization and paganization among the peoples and tribes around him. Although many people still had some idea of God's Word, they were sinking further and further into paganism.

The three friends also witnessed this change; that is if they had their eyes open. What happens in a society where the Word of God is forgotten? Do all those who forsake God get into trouble? Not at all! Look around,

“... the wicked live on,
growing old and increasing in power.
They see their children established around them,
their offspring before their eyes...
...They send forth their children as a flock,
their little ones dance about' (21:7,8, 11).

There were numerous examples of large families, in which not one of the members died, whereas Job lost all his children in one day. He had observed people who were careless in living their lives without God; and yet they enjoyed endless prosperity. They saw their children grow strong and take up their place in society.

These people who forgot God, though not for lack of knowledge, continued to live in perfect safety. They were healthy and strong and carved out a generous existence for themselves; they feared nothing and lived in a well-structured world. Job was talking about people who were smart, hard-working and healthy, even in old age. They enjoyed prosperity; no bad accidents or

failures came their way. They were regarded as examples of hale and hearty human life.

These people enjoyed life. They calmly went about their tasks, building a civilization, yet not without fun and healthy laughter, music and songs. Even death brought little sadness: often they died quietly in their sleep without suffering a lengthy and painful illness.

Job's discussion had to do with cultural niceties like virtue and refinement and with people known in history as representatives of the good life; we might refer to them as recipients of 'Common Grace'³³ Yet note that these people had no interest in God. They ignored Him. Their whole life witnessed to such a denial. They had their wisdom, their pleasure, their prosperity and their strength; but for the Lord they had no time nor is He even part of their world.

'According to your theory', Job was saying to his friends, 'all these people's lives ought to turn into misery, without delay'. Of course it did happen at times but it was not the rule. We have all known of many examples of those who were at peace in enjoyment of the good life -but without God. The friends might have said that these godless people had no control over their own prosperity and claimed that as the reason for not wishing to live like that. But that was not the issue. Particular views on lifestyle were not in question here; but even those who did not share the views of an ever increasing number of godless people, had to face the fact that up to that time numerous godless people were living a wonderful life. So, what did that prove?

One might have said, "God stores up man's punishment for his sons." [21:19] Perhaps; but that would not address the issue either. Their ongoing prosperity was a solid fact. You couldn't argue that away. It was also obvious that in Job's days the number of God-fearing people was diminishing to near extinction, while the godless enjoyed peace. Would a godless man have been bothered by the thought that his offspring might be destroyed? By that time he would have died and would know nothing. His own life had been a completed cycle of peace and happiness and a contrary opinion would have been hard to accept.

Job was acquainted with such prosperous and godless people; there may well have been some in his own family. The transition from a more universal to a particular phase in the history of the Covenant was no minor event. It was a disaster of world-wide proportions which even today, some 4000 years later, has not been repaired. To this day, there are millions and millions of unbelievers who promote this trend of early antiquity. Their origin was in servanthood; the demands of God's Covenant will never be lifted from them. To live in a time when the world in general was becoming more godless while only a remnant remained faithful, was a burdensome

³³ 'Common Grace' a theological term that describes God's favour in His creation, which maintains structure and relative peace in the world. It is distinguished from 'Saving Grace' which He bestows on His elect.

task.

14. Job Tested the Wisdom of His Friends (21;22-34)

Job continued by addressing another argument of one of his friends, but he directed his accusations at all three of them, because they had displayed complete solidarity on this issue. He appeared to be directing primarily at the words of Eliphaz in 15:15 where he said, "...God places no trust in his holy ones"³⁴. Job hinted at this verse when he said, "Can anyone teach knowledge to God, since he judges even the highest?"(21:22). With this slight alteration Job could accept Eliphaz' remark. This may well have been the only passage in the book of Job where we might conclude that Job knew of the fall of the unfaithful angels. If this was the case it showed that Job had a very different view of the realm of angels from that of Eliphaz. The latter had said that if God placed no trust in his angels, how much less in man who was vile and corrupt.(15:15,16). His confession about angels was as faulty as that regarding humans. We hold that the faithful angels are definitely pure in God's eye: they are the holy angels who will accompany Christ on His return. Likewise, people are not 'vile' because they are created but because they have fallen into sin.

Job eagerly admitted that God had judged the world of angels. However, that was not the issue here. He went on to question them saying that first of all they were being unfaithful to their own viewpoint when they said that, based on God's righteousness, man could not teach God anything. Weren't they themselves busy teaching God by trying to white-wash him with their deceitful advocacy? Job's request to God for justice was not worse than their attempt to justify Him. Secondly, if God judged the world of angels why did he fail to do so towards the world of mankind? That he refrained from doing so was clear: one person died quietly and peacefully after a life of health and happiness; another died

"...in bitterness of soul,
never having enjoyed anything good." (21:25)

Few words could be as bitter as these: 'never having enjoyed anything good'. How unimaginably poor would such a person be who had never shared in the banquet of life.

Job did not idealize the situation. He knew that there were rich people who died in their

³⁴ According to Popma that means his angels

riches, and many poor who did not even know the extent of their poverty. Both died and

“Side by side they lie in the dust,
and worms cover them both.”(21:26)

“No earthling can flee from all sorrow,
For in one earth all pain shall descend,
Betrayed and betrayer, both forgotten
Shall sleep together without end.”³⁵

After his appeal for the cooperation of the friends, Job began his criticism. He fully expected that they would finally listen to him, at least, two of them because Zophar had stopped listening already. Job accused them of wearing blinders in order to see only what they wanted to see. That incorrect way of looking at things was dishonest and was hurting Job. They might have wanted to say, “Where now is the great man’s house?” (vs28) and have wondered about the peaceful dwellings of the godless. That was how they chose their examples but that was not wisdom. Their wisdom did not match the proverbs of the travellers who had seen much of the world and whose words of experience were used by many. Their observations showed that the godless *were* spared from disaster. It had become a byword, because it happened so frequently. If the friends denied this they had a strange view of life.

That is why Job considered their views so foolish.

³⁵ Popma quoted this Dutch poem; “Geen leed is voor de levenden te ontvlieden, maar in een aarde eindigt alle pijn, waar de verradenen en die verrieden vergeten in den slaap der eeuwen zijn.”

15. A Review and A Preview

In chapters 15-21 we have seen the discussions move towards greater and greater enmity on the parts of the friends who no longer really deserved that name. It is the reason why we called this section ‘**The Friendship Was Poisoned**’. The next section reveals a somewhat more moderate attitude on the part of two of the friends. Zophar, the most biting of the three, took no part in the final discussions of Job and his friends. This section, containing the chapters 22-32 gives a relatively restrained ending to the discussions. Job and his friends did not reach a conclusion.

As far as Job was concerned, he had come to the greatest conquest of faith in the chapter we called ‘**The Friendship Was Poisoned**’. He called on God to defend him against God himself and suddenly uttered the moving statement, “O earth, do not cover my blood!” and saw his advocate on High. (16:18ff) After one more poisonous attack he pushed through to a vision of the new earth and exclaimed,

“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)

The friends, on the other hand, hardened themselves on the road of unfaithfulness. Zophar called Job a man who drank in unrighteousness like water, and presented a view regarding angels and people that was far from scriptural (ch.15). Bildad was extremely irritated and accused Job of treating his friends like cattle (18:3). Zophar was seething and poured undiluted bile over the ailing Job (ch.20).

Job made a little progress by insisting on the faithfulness of the bond of friendship. He renewed the relationship between the friends and himself and did manage to improve the relation slightly. Nevertheless, he had to remind his friends that their views were false; that they knew neither their world nor their time; and that they tenaciously held to views that they could not deny because their own claim to wisdom depended on it.

The ‘second round’, unlike the first one, did have some results. First of all Job had claimed a nearly impossible victory for the knowledge of faith. This proved to be an advantage from which he did not retreat. In the second place, and not unrelated, *we* could now see better

that Job, in spite of the excessive boldness of his faith, could maintain that his prayers were pure.(16:17). The friends had pretty well reached a dead end. They could not deny that they had disappointed miserably in their duty as friends. Job was the one who practised 'christian wrath' because he had to remind them that they did not even listen. While he would have accepted just their listening as evidence of comforting.

Now we will enter the 'third round'. This one was different from the other two. Not only did Zophar, the most vehement of the three, not participate, but Eliphaz and Bildad without actually giving up their viewpoint, appeared to be tired and even a bit unsure of themselves. In '**A More Moderate Conclusion**', as we have named the third section, we will be looking at the final speech of Job whose role had become an increasingly dominant one. This third part will be followed by the speeches of the much younger Elihu. From him we will hear a different approach. Elihu did not have a solution either but what he had to say contained so much that is helpful that Job did not feel the need to react to it. Neither did the three friends disagree with Elihu as we will see. This '**Orthodox Intermezzo**' as we will call the section with the speeches of Elihu, demands special attention for composition.

The fifth section will contain the final '**Discussion with God**'. At that point this wonderful book reaches its true climax. A final chapter, with historical data, will give us insight into Job's later life; but by that time he had returned to the world of 'normal' people. His task as witness to new revelation was then a different one; no longer would he have to reach for the impossible in his distress and doubt, but he would give a calm witness to the certainty of his newly acquired faith.

III. A More Moderate Conclusion

1. Eliphaz Renewed His Accusation Against Job

Chapters 22-31 contain the third and last set of discussions of the friends with Job. They could not relinquish their position but were showing signs of getting tired. Zophar, of the three the most keen in violating God's law for friendship, did not take part in this series. This may help explain the more moderate tone of the third section. The most hostile of the three had fallen silent; perhaps his energies were spent.

The others continued with a restatement and refinement of their views. Perhaps they were puzzled at Job's persistence in opposing them. Though near to death, Job kept coming back with energy to resist their flowery sermons. The attitude of the friends continued to be shocking in its cruelty. With naive malevolence they thought they could trap Job with their arguments. His ceaseless resistance baffled and irritated them. How could anyone already so weakened continue to resist them and their 'unblemished wisdom'?

In this exchange we see something of the unpredictable difficulties of spiritual or religious discourse. The friends of Job were sincere in their search for God. They lived in the age of a worldwide disaster, namely the process of secularization of all peoples on the earth. Yet at such a time Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were seeking God. They were men of firm principles, holding to their wisdom and believing it to be based on God's self revelation. Indeed their wisdom embraced much revelational truth. But it also contained much foolishness. In attempting to adjudicate God's case they did not realize that they were trying to justify an essentially crooked situation. As if God's cause had the slightest need for their attempts at justification. According to their view of mankind and human sin the distinction between creation and fall had all but disappeared. They did have some knowledge of God. That is why their words were so vehement. Based on their understanding of God they passed judgement on Job, the man who was suffering and already near death in his own eyes.

Job himself discovered a wider horizon. Without a clear awareness of his own obedience to the wisdom of God's law of love, he repeatedly confronted his friends with the narrow limitations of their horizons. They couldn't get beyond those limits because they had entrenched themselves in their positions. History provides more examples of this kind of resistance and rejection of religious renewal. It is all the more regrettable when the perpetrators are people of faith who live godly lives and know the power of faith. Yet, they are unable to see that they are

opposing the work of God while pursuing their own mission with all sincerity.

We recognize them as upright and honest people, yet they are unable to see that they are opposing the work of God, and thus pursuing their own mission with all sincerity. Every movement for renewal calls to life powers opposing changes together with a host of sinful consequences: cheating, hatred, cold diplomacy and even open or covert persecution.

With every revival those who have been awakened to new depth of faith also cling to their righteousness; defending it against the sly or naive attacks of those who oppose the renewal. Their behaviour is not always characterized by the blamelessness of Job. Yet Job's behaviour provides an example for all renewals, for he received his blamelessness as a perfect gift from the Lord. Those who have been justified by the Judge of the whole world, have a new kind of blamelessness, one no less certain or less defensible than that of Job.

We might be tempted to take an 'a universalist' approach, relativizing the differences because we are all children of one Father. But such an approach betrays the cause; it makes the struggle into a joke and turns 'truth' into a woman of easy virtue who indiscriminately gives herself to anyone who happens to come along. She represents a very fine kind of prostitution starting her customers on the road which leads toward the man of sin, the Antichrist, the one pre-eminently equipped to mock and blaspheme all God's handiwork.

Eliphaz had not yet sunk to such degradation. He had walled himself in with his confession and was unable to see its constricting boundaries. He was sold on the antiquity of this wisdom and knew nothing of the renewal which God was ushering in. He did not find it difficult to condemn a person who was suffering and near death.

He exalted the truth but was blind to the fact that the version of his truth strayed from God's truth. Yet his maintenance of truth carried a reminder of faithfulness to the truth.

His argument was simple. He had heard Job's cry for justice but he could not free himself from his limited knowledge. "Can a man be of benefit to God?" he asked in 22:2. No, the wise and faithful person would only do himself a favour. That was Eliphaz's starting point but this view also contained a falsehood. That was not the way to talk about the Lord. Eliphaz was creating a false image of God just as all the images that we create of God are false. He represented God as high and mighty, aloof from his people and not benefiting from their worship. Job had said something similar when he complained in prayer, "if I have sinned, what have I done to you?" (7:20), and in 10:3, "Does it please you to oppress me?". but the tone of his voice was entirely different from that of Eliphaz. The similarity was on the surface: just as there was no advantage for the Lord when people serve Him, so also there was no damage done by

human transgression. In both cases a confession of God's majesty appear to have been presented. But the prayerful complaint of Job was a strong cry for justice and an appeal for God's love. Eliphaz's confession, in contrast, presented an unfeeling theology. Note the conclusion he drew from his idea that a believer could not benefit God but only himself: Job obviously could not have been God-fearing since things went wrong in his life and God's accounting would not have allowed Job to be punished for his piety. Therefore his wickedness must have been great!

2. The Sins of Job According to Eliphaz

(22:1-20)

In his haste to justify God Eliphaz forgot that God is far more intimately involved with the lives of his children than he could ever have imagined. Readers of the book of Job already know this. They remember the prologue in Heaven although Job was not aware of it. They remember that God became more and more involved in the life of his children until he sent His Son in the fullness of time, revealing himself as flesh in a human world and thus concerning Himself more intimately in the life of his people. You can't get closer than that! The Word became flesh, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."³⁶

That is true to this day. Job was meant to be an example and an instruction; he was in some way unique in his affliction, but was at the same time an illustration to us of what all God's children occasionally experience. All have a need to cry out for justice and all experience moments of living in darkness. None know the extent of the Lord's involvement in their lives nor are they aware of the terrible struggle between God and Satan, fought on the battle field of their lives, their work, their church and even in the secret places of their heart. They do know that the Judge of the whole earth will judge them rightly, though He might make them wait a very long time; it spurs them on to continue in prayer without ceasing.

Meanwhile, Eliphaz got all steamed up about his own brilliant insights.

"Is not your wickedness great?
Are not your sins endless?" (22:5)

³⁶ John 1:1

There are still many today who believe they can make this kind of statement with a clear conscience. When someone cries to God for justice they say, 'Don't forget you are only a sinner!' Such advice is really cheap and whoever uses such a cheap argument misses the truth. After all, truth and wisdom don't come cheap. In chapter 28 we will see that Job also knew that truth could not be purchased. There is a puzzling proverb, "Give up all you have to obtain truth but never try to sell it." And Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:17 wrote, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit." We are not hucksters giving advice for profit. We are told, "Life is a struggle", (can one put a dollar value on struggling?). So we struggle, check our progress and continue on our way. Devotional aids are printed by the thousands and quick profits from piety abound. The witness of Christianity has become a profitable business. Works of charity resemble business enterprises with profit sheets. But the 'pearl of great price'³⁷ does not turn up in their marketplace.

Still, Eliphaz was not satisfied with his cheap platitudes. Maybe he himself sensed the need to be more concrete, and did so. He proceeded to test Job against a complex system of basic principles and found him wanting. This may have been rooted in principial objection of Eliphaz against the lifestyle of the community to which Job belonged. He knew something about guilt by association. If Job lived among people like that he shared responsibility for their morals.

That brings up the question, 'What was the nature of this community?' According to Eliphaz they were a people who, without sufficient reason, demanded security deposits from brothers. Those in financial trouble were stripped of their clothing and left naked. Those in need of water had no access; the hungry went without food. Describing the social ills, Eliphaz clearly implied that Job shared in such injustices. After all, he was a man of power, a leader among those who lived peaceful and prosperous lives in the magnificent houses only the rich could afford. But the widows were neglected and when the orphans stretched out their hand for justice, they found their arm ripped off instead.

That was the kind of country in which Job lived; and that was the guilt he shared. So it was not surprising that he found himself surrounded by snares and that sudden peril terrified him. (22:10) That is why Eliphaz continued with murderous sarcasm, that darkness blinded him and flood waters covered him. (see vs 11)

Also Eliphaz once again denied God's involvement in the lives of his people, by reminding Job that He lived in the heights of heaven, higher than the highest stars. Ascribing this

same belief to Job, Eliphaz accused Job of concluding that God could not see what went on below. As if, when clouds covered the earth with darkness, God could not see the actions of people on that earth but He would blithely walk in His own light and remain high above the firmament.

The concept of a remote God, far removed and unconcerned about the earth, is familiar to us from various pagan religions. While Eliphaz reproached Job with the consequences of such blasphemy, he conveniently forgot that he himself just finished proclaiming the idea of a high and mighty God who maintained His distance and took no pleasure in the affairs of His creatures.

3. The Path of Destruction (22:1-20 continued)

Then Eliphaz began to talk about the tradition of the godless who had travelled the path of destruction throughout the ages. Eliphaz had a general knowledge of that history, for he knew that there had been godless people throughout the centuries. He might well have received such knowledge from God's Word revelation and incorporated it into his own philosophy of life.

The path of destruction is an old path, the ancient way which is always being travelled by those who forsake God. Eliphaz became intoxicated with his own moralism. He also made a strong defence of his hard won reputation as a wise man. Anyone who dared to challenge him on that would get a good dose of his anger, for his treasury of knowledge contained some devastating responses which he was only too ready to dig up for those who would sully his fame.

It is not easy to pursue a good spiritual or religious discussion, as we have said; it is only too easy to trip and fall. One can stumble by creating fear in someone by painting a picture of the awful punishment to come; or by directing someone along an impossible road; or conversely, one can fall by using the rhetoric of flowery language to assure others that all our struggles don't really make any difference and that those in heaven merely smile at our useless efforts.

Eliphaz who was a serious and a wise man, stumbled in his own way. He stuck to his established conviction: since Job did not walk on that road of wisdom, he confidently proclaimed that Job must therefore be on the road of the unrighteous. It was obviously not easy to maintain a religious discourse without stumbling!

³⁷ See the parable of the pearl in Matthew 13:45

The tradition taught that reprobates would be cut short before their time. Eliphaz respected that tradition but paid little attention to his own time. He did not recognize that he was living in a time of world-wide disaster, a time, noted emphatically by Job, in which the godless prospered in health and wealth (ch. 21). Eliphaz recognized only the ungodly who met an untimely end and whose foundations were washed away as by a flood.

These people were leaving the covenant and saying to God, "Leave us alone!" and thinking, "What can the Almighty do to us?"(vs17). Thus Eliphaz gave voice to the attitude of those who deserted the covenant; those who were in the covenant but wanted out. Although He surrounded them like a protective wall, they wanted to drive the Lord away. Eliphaz may have referred to the massive abandonment of the covenant during the last centuries before the Flood. In that way Eliphaz, who admired the ancient ways, had seen clearly the decadence that led to the Flood but he did not notice what was happening in his own time as people were drifting away and knowledge of the truth was dwindling rapidly.

So, according to Eliphaz, that was what people did in ancient times, "Yet it was he who filled their houses with good things, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked."(vs18). In other words Eliphaz despised that attitude. He was convinced that the wicked would perish, just as in the days of Noah they had perished in the Flood. The righteous might have rejoiced over that punishment. The innocent might have mocked the demise of the deserters of the covenant.

"Surely our foes are destroyed,
and fire devours their wealth." (vs20)

This last comment appeared to be a reminder of an event in a later period: it may have referred to Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁸ As we have noticed repeatedly, there were acceptable elements in the discussions of the friends. Theirs was not just a language of unbelief. Their resistance to the renewal represented by the life of Job before Job himself knew of it, was not just foolishness. They knew of a way, a pious way of life which indeed exists even today. Many counter-reform movements have been led by upright and faithful people. But it is always important to understand the signs of the times. Jesus' command to remain faithful is an important reminder.³⁹ Even where the life of faith is strong, a lack of watchfulness can do much damage.

Job was struggling in the dark. He saw new things and noticed the inadequacy of the old ways; but he could not get the whole picture into perspective yet. Job could not yet see that the

³⁸ See: Genesis 19

³⁹ See: Matthew 25:13 and Mt. 26:41

light he had received was quite new, for while connecting to the old, it gave a totally new glow to all things.

4. Friendly Reprimand (22:21-30)

Eliphaz continued with his discourse and we can not deny seeing an element of kindly support in his words. The words of the friends were not altogether false, although we do need to keep the entire context in focus. When Eliphaz began to give Job friendly correction it was based on his conviction that God was exalted in the highest heaven and that one neither favoured Him by showing honour nor damaged Him by withholding it. So Eliphaz concluded that God could not possibly be punishing Job for his piety and accordingly Job must have belonged to an evil generation.

Taken out of context, this thought has some merit. It certainly shows a high regard for human solidarity. Those who are citizens of an overly imperialistic country are restricted in their freedom to worship God. Sometimes they have to make hard choices: living as a true Christian may pre-empt the claims of citizenship.

But Eliphaz seemed to be going too far when he assumed that Job was to be identified with the perverse generation of his day and therefore guilty through association. Surely, even in an evil nation true faith could flourish.

Nevertheless we can appreciate the friendly tone of Eliphaz' reproof. He urged Job to submit himself to God; surely that was good advice. It was straightforward and modest. Proving repentance by our deeds⁴⁰ seldom means that we do something extraordinary: submission to the Lord and calmly trusting His Word are such fruits and probably among the best.

“Submit to God and be at peace with him;
in this way prosperity will come to you.” (22:21)

Those were not the words of a hypocrite. We don't doubt the personal sincerity of Eliphaz. We would be on the wrong track if we looked only for wickedness and falsehood. Those were present too far, basically, he was a man of irreconcilable opposites. He urged Job to repent but Job was not in a position to compare notes with him on this. Whereas Eliphaz had possessions, all of Job's earthly good had vanished ; he could only speak from utter grief and poverty. Yet he stood

firm, in that respect, and in so doing really knew himself only in part.

Eliphaz pointed to the rewards of service to God. It also becomes evident that Eliphaz sincerely wished that Job would regain his prosperity.

“Accept instruction from his mouth” (vs 22). To be sure, Eliphaz identified God’s words with his own subjective insight but, perhaps, all of us would have ended up doing the same. Eliphaz had recognized the ancient, traditional way of piety as the only one possible and could not see beyond it. In this Eliphaz was being tested and made the wrong choice. But he meant well, which was more than we could say of the other friends; he tried to direct Job on the way of peace. His solid advice was : to listen carefully to the instruction of God and take His words to heart. It was advice that we could adopt unaltered as long as we remember that the Scriptures transcend our experience and even our communal confession.

Eliphaz urged Job to repent and such encouragement was not altogether misplaced. Job could not deny the need for daily repentance nor did he do so. Eliphaz knew that Job had been very rich, and he confronted him with it in a round-about way. Of course, the Temanite knew that his friend was now very poor, even poorer than he could imagine. But he suspected that in his heart Job was still clinging to his lost wealth. This, in turn, led to his assumption that Job, through his partnerships in commercial ventures of his time, was also a partner in its worship of the malevolent Mammon. This was the kind of assumption we could expect from a man like Eliphaz but he was quite wrong to make it. The Temanite, understandably, had made no allowances for riches earned through legitimate means. Indeed there are many temptations for those who are wealthy. There is only one way to appreciate riches; namely through the realization that all our possessions are gifts from on high. Eliphaz’ difficulty was rooted in his inability to recognize God’s sovereignty.

Repent of your desire for riches, he advised Job: then the Lord Himself will become your gold and silver; then you will find delight in the Almighty (vs26). Delight is an indispensable part of faith, and the Bible is full of instructions to be joyful. But such a reminder was extremely painful for Job in his circumstance. For the task that confronted him was to get through the extreme pain of his suffering and yet *to remain himself*. It was something he could only accomplish by crying aloud with the complaints of his faith and those complaints had their own justification.

Surely, then Job would have found delight in the Almighty and lifted up his face to God. All of this was the language of faith and it was well meant. It wasn’t foolish moralism, albeit it

⁴⁰ Cf.: Acts 26:20.

slightly tainted with a moralistic streak. The faithful believer might have expected to experience grace and respect in this world. His ventures may well have succeeded; he may even have lifted up those who were downcast. Job might even have saved the guilty, those who could not have looked him straight in the eye, because in this he enjoyed God's support. The final outcome of Job's situation would have been so much the more secure, if only he would have repented.

Eliphaz certainly meant well. Yet a piety which was so cultivated and short-sighted could be inhumanly cruel. Victims of this kind of religiosity abound.

5. Job Answers Eliphaz' Third Speech (Chapter 23)

In Job's answer to the third speech of Eliphaz, we notice immediately that, in spite of his suffering, he did not allow his attention to waver. The reader of this book may well be aware that Satan worked tirelessly behind the scenes. And we, when we allow our faith to be distracted, give Satan the advantage; nor can we predict how much difficulty this may give us. Again we note that, in this respect, Job was blameless; he did not let anything distract him from his effort of faith.

Yet, he had sufficient occasion to do so. He was poor, altogether bereft of his possessions, had lost his children, his position of leadership and social prestige. He was even more impoverished because his friends had betrayed the basic rule of friendship. But his worst impoverishment came through the loss of the joy of faith and the utter loneliness of feeling forsaken by the God of his salvation. He was unable to be glad in the Lord, to find the delight which alone could make even imprisonment and terminal illness bearable. Job felt himself to be a prisoner; his contact with other human beings was cut off. He too felt deadly ill and his symptoms were such that it was unreasonable to hope for healing. He was not to be reproached for thinking of himself as incurably ill. For example, even those who trust in a God who works miracles do not expect healing when both their legs have been amputated. They simply know they will never walk again. That was the kind of conviction Job had, that he would never recover from his illness.

Yet Job did not abandon the claim to his righteousness. It was no moralistic or pharisaical righteousness. That was clear enough from his attitude towards his children when they held their feasts. Nor did Job put his trust in his own heart; that, too, was an evil he had learned to

avoid.

We continue to marvel at the force with which he repeatedly resisted the views of his friends. Although Job would not have noted this, we nonetheless may recognize God's grace in renewing the energies of those who have no more. Job could not have known that in his discussions with his friends, it was the Lord who renewed his strength.

As Job continued his complaint, he used the themes of the third chapter, reiterating his claim that he was blameless. Again he spoke, "Also today my complaint is defiant." (c.f. vs 1). Did that mean: 'My friends this time you may well interpret my words as defiant'? Or did he mean: 'I am complaining to God, and there is a defiant element in my complaint'? We should not rule out this last option, for it reflects on the audacity of faith which is boldness before God. The friends were free of such audacity and considered it rather questionable. Even orthodoxy, as we will soon see from the discussions of Elihu, was uncomfortable with such defiance. Nonetheless, the Lord may well have rejoiced in Job's boldness. There does exist a kind of humility that is impious and there is also a defiance which, if not altogether pious, is yet far more desirable than the submissiveness of humble arrogance.

Job was not oblivious to the danger that was hidden in his defiance. He said, "Even though my hand, (i.e. my strength or self-control) still constrains my groaning." (32:2b).⁴¹ Job was not careless in losing control. He restrained his complaining and maintained a conscious self control. He continued by speaking about his religious poverty,

"If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!" (23:3)

Job couldn't find God. For one who fears God that was the worst thing that could happen. If only he could have found God, he would have explained his cause to Him and then listened to God's answer. Did his friends really think that God would use the full force of His power against him? Here Job was criticizing the theology of the three friends, as they had continuously referred to God's majesty and omnipotence but had missed the true characterization of that omnipotence.

Here Job was on the threshold of a new discovery of faith:

"Would He contend with me by the greatness of *His* power?
No, surely He would pay attention to me." (NASB 23:6)

Job admitted that he did not know where to find him but if he could have found him he would have pleaded his cause with Him. He knew this much, that God was the Almighty one but at the

⁴¹ Translated from the Dutch N.V.: all English translations say 'his' (God's) hand; only the Jerusalem Bible in a footnote states that the Hebrew is 'mine' as in 'hand of mine'.

same time he would patiently and carefully have listened to Job.

It is wonderful to observe the growth of Job's faith in spite of oppression, poverty and the inhuman treatment he received from his friends. God Himself was at work. Job accomplished impossible acts of faith- and, of course, he could not do that by himself. But he was acting out a drama important for both people and angels then and still today. He dramatized the mighty acts of God, a God who had reduced his child to poverty without even telling him about his part in a much larger battle for righteousness. Job did not even know that God Himself had initiated this battle, had even involved Himself with Satan in this test or rather, had allowed Himself to get involved in such hideous testing. Yet this God was indeed great in power, omnipotent. His counsel was truly inscrutable. Soon He would become even more involved in human affairs as He sent His very own Son to become fully human. This same son who, only hours before his arrest said, to His disciples, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?"⁴² But in the first instance it was Job who had to keep watch.

It is easy to see here that the Job of the Scriptures was altogether different from the subject of the popular saying, 'the patience of Job'. He was actually an unwearying warrior. The Bible contains few heroes who could fight like Job. He fought with his back to the wall; he fought because he was attacked by his friends who at times proved to be false to a greater or lesser degree. Without their attacks, Job would not have continued the struggle; he would only have wallowed in his misery. Their accusations forced him to a defence and through his resistance Job made incredible conquests of faith. God had given Job a seed of imperishability and particularly in this struggle he proved indestructible. This served to distract Job from his misery caused by the hidden dispute between God and Satan.

At least there existed one man on the earth who struggled with Satan without knowing him, one who saw only the effects of evil plans without being aware of the evil being who caused them.

In some limited sense, every Christian must fight the evil one in this way.

The movements of the Spirit of Darkness are seldom discernible. Sometimes he works through public opinion, sometimes through literature; at times he uses idolized patriotism or political apathy. He is seldom clearly identifiable [recognizable]. His subtle motivation is to be suspected behind all human sinfulness. From the first sin to all those which followed, wilful disobedience has gone hand in hand with Satan's temptation, inseparably united and indistinguishably bonded.

6. The Elusive Judge (23:3-12)

“If only I knew where to find him”, Job said, “I would state my case as a righteous man before him”(23:3a, 4a). Job maintained his righteousness. Even though he knew that righteousness was a gift that did not make it less real.

“And I would be forever delivered from my judge.” (vs.7b)

Some think that the views of believers in the Old Testament were more down to earth than ours. As if we don't think from an earthly perspective! We have no choice and it is proper; it is part and parcel of our calling. Our human nature is not different from that of the people in the time of Job. We also experience bitterness when adversity strikes us; when our children go astray, our health deteriorates or we struggle with poverty; when we experience the incredible foolishness of fellow believers, all children of God, and suffer the consequences in our own lives. We rightly sense a judgement in these situations. When our children are killed or taken captive in war, we experience that, too, as God's wrath.

“If I only knew where to find him,... I would be forever delivered from my judge.” But He is the Judge who cannot be discovered. He is nowhere to be found. He is the Judge of heaven and earth and His chosen ones call to Him day and night; He will judge them but keeps His own counsel as to when this will be.

Job turned to the four points of the compass but could not find the Lord anywhere.

“But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (vs.10)

This was the language of the righteous and blameless, those who had been justified in spite of their sins.

The Psalms, too, presented believers who mourned over their sins and yet burst out in praise to God. Psalm 31 showed a believer, probably not David, but a member of a later generation, who commanded an outlying border post to defend his country while experiencing the disinterest and lack of funding from the people in Jerusalem. He spoke of his strength failing because of his affliction⁴⁹; and again of his alarm which led him to exclaim,

⁴² See Mat. 26:40

⁴⁹ See Psalm 31:10

“I am cut off from your sight!
Yet you heard my cry for mercy,
when I called to you for help.
Love the Lord all his saints!”⁵⁰

Job also knew both these sides of the life of faith, the misery of our sin and the joy of having been saved from it. But in his struggle all the emphasis fell on the righteousness he had obtained.

“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...” (vss. 11-12)

We must remember that these words of Job followed on those of his friends with their elaborate and relentless claims regarding the serious moral blemishes of Job’s past and the arrogance of his pretence to innocence. Job, however, maintained his own righteousness and refused to adjust his answers in response to the accusations of his friends.

⁵⁰ See Psalm 31: 22,23

7. A Hidden God (23:13-17)

Job complained that because God hid Himself, he could not find his judge. He was right. Our misery too results from God hiding Himself from us. But it is *our* good fortune that the Scriptures reveal God to us not an *Idea* of God. He has always kept secrets from us: secrets regarding salvation or election. And Job, too, was confronted with one of God's secrets.

Many of God's secrets have been revealed. Ephesians 1:9 speaks of the revelation of the "mystery of his will." But there are also secrets which God does not reveal. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever,..."⁵¹

Job himself was instrumental in the revelation of things which had been hidden. But now he had reached a threshold. There were secrets that he had to leave with God. He had arrived at the horizon of vision; his insight reached no further.

Now we have come to a complication in Job's struggle: he erred while he made progress. We have already seen a couple of mistakes. He had accused the Lord of doing him an injustice and that was obviously an error. But we cannot be completely certain whether such an error was also considered a sin. We may allow an error in faith to be considered as not being sinful. Later Job would be told that he had lacked in understanding. And yet he would also be praised because he had spoken well of the Lord.

When Job thought that the Lord had made a mistake he was on safer ground than the rationalist who turns God into a mechanism of infallibility. Our God is no computer. We are called to respect the second commandment⁵², because the law is His law and He will never abandon it. At the same time we must not forget that God transcends His own law. He will negate every theological construct of Him which we may devise.

Job made a mistake; or was it just shortsightedness? These are almost identical here. He was confronted with a mystery and had an inkling of the truth,

"But he stands alone, and who can oppose him?
He does whatever he pleases." (vs.13)

⁵¹ See Deuteronomy 29:29

⁵² See Exodus 20:4

Later, when Job had discovered the incredible breadth of God's sovereignty and when he had discerned that His power was greater than anyone could imagine, he used corresponding language.⁵³

“That is why I am terrified before him;
when I think of all this I fear him,
God has made my heart faint;
the Almighty has terrified me.” (vss. 15,16)

Job was afraid of perishing but not because of the gloom of his misery, nor because of the darkness that covered his face, (vs.17). He would have perished because he could not find God. He knew that God knew him and could test him so that he would have proven to be blameless. But he could no longer find His dwelling; he could not ask for an audience to have a discussion with Him. He had no idea where God was. That was worse than all Job's pain and poverty.

8. Chaos in the Human World (chapter 24)

The friends of Job considered themselves wise in knowing the rules used by God in human affairs. They loved the idea of a general revelation in history. But Job taught them a lesson. Hopefully we too will learn from it.

Wasn't it amazing, reflected Job, how the Almighty had not set times for judgement? (cf. vs. 1) even those who knew Him well, his own children who longed to see justice done, were never told of the day when God held court. As long as the Almighty Judge of heaven and earth let his chosen ones wait, they were faced with a situation in which justice was delayed.

Strange things have been happening in this world; it was hard to discover its order from observing events. There were crooks who stole the property of their neighbours, sometimes through brute force, at other times by means of concocting a new 'economic policy' of wealth redistribution. It made little difference how it was done. There were thieves who stole cattle on a grand scale. Job himself was the victim of such a scheme; it was one of the causes of his poverty.

There were also petty thieves who would steal the one donkey belonging to a widow or, although it might have been legal but just as distressing, they might have taken in pledge the

⁵³ See 42:2

single ox she still owned.⁵⁴ Then there were the arrogant snobs who forced the poor to take to the ditches. The needy took cover from these brutes. Sometimes they might even have been poor themselves. These, driven out into the desert like wild donkeys and while looking for food for their children in the wilderness and not finding any, then plundered the crops of the fields by night and stole the grapes from the vineyards of the wealthy. They recognized no law nor limit for their lives. They were so poor that they lacked even a blanket to cover themselves at night,

“Lacking clothes, they spent 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.” (vss.7,8)

They snatched fatherless babies to sell as slaves, using force against those who could not resist them. When they worked as day labourers the money they earned was never enough; they still went hungry in the midst of plenty.

These were the things that happened in our world. Where was God’s justice in all of this? Why did He not charge such people with wrongdoing? Even His faithful and chosen ones had to wait an interminably long time for Him to act.

Things were not much better in the cities than in the countryside. There one heard the groaning of the dying and the cries of those who had been beaten and robbed. God saw it and knew about it, yet He did nothing.

So where did that leave Job’s friends with all their beautiful theories? Just as in the 21st chapter, Job once again insisted that they did not understand their times. They had blindfolded themselves with their assumptions and theories, but ignored the facts. Whereas before, in chapter 21 he emphasized the prosperity of the godless, in chapter 24 he gave a more gripping and realistic portrait of evil: he described the chaos of history where robbing and being robbed were the order of the day. There have been few rejections of the dogma of God’s general revelation that were as vehement. It is apparent that God was working in him. We too would do well to listen.

Job gave a few more examples and proceeded to demolish other sacrosanct assumptions of his friends’ wisdom. He encouraged them to take a look at three types of evil: that of the murderer, the adulterer and the thief. They should have known that such people existed, shouldn’t they? They were a constant presence in any society. They were the vulgar and uncouth ones and darkness was their domain. It was late at night when the murderer would commit his

⁵⁴ Cf. Deuteronomy 22:22-27

heinous crime; the adulterer sought his secret pleasure after night fell; and in the middle of the night the thief would bore his way through the adobe walls of his unsuspecting neighbours. Such folk disappeared with the advent of day. Darkness was their friend, because their activities could not stand the light of day!

It is known by all of us that these kind of people are always around. There has never been a society on earth where one cannot find them. On numerous occasions they may even be successful for a while. So there are always new recruits for their ranks. It is a strange phenomenon because, as Job already observed, sooner or later 'fate' would catch up with them. They would float away like dry leaves on fast flowing water. They developed a bad name and every human community cursed these evildoers. They knew no peace as did those who were content with their lives. Often they died young, disappearing like snow before the sun. Their own mothers rejected them, ashamed of having nurtured a criminal; but in the womb of the earth they provided a welcome meal for the worms.

We suspect that Job had reshaped his own view of life and reality during this time of illness and poverty. He may have noticed these things before but they have taken on a different meaning for him. Where he formerly had been satisfied with his prosperity and godliness, his misery had forced him to recognize many things he had overlooked in the past. Not that he was a superficial person, for in chapter 29:4 he spoke of

“..the days when I was in my prime,
when God’s intimate friendship blessed my house,”

Job had experienced a life of sanctification. But he had come to change his opinion on many things and had revised his view of life. It was remarkable that he could summon the energy and interest for this. The evidence of God working in him has become recognizable to us but not to Job himself.

He continued in a merciless fashion to point out the risky life of those who never considered others. They did what was right in their own eyes: they plundered the barren (and therefore rejected) women; they ignored the needs of the widows and even overpowered mighty rulers. Yet, note well, they were never free from a sense of insecurity and danger. They were never sure of their life. (We think inevitably of the dictators of our day). As long as they were successful they thought they had a right to their power and wiles. They did not know or didn't acknowledge that their windfall of success depended on God, and that He paid close attention to all their activities. There was such a frightful discrepancy between the spirit in which they exercised power and the caring Spirit of God over their lives. Human life has always been

strange and full of surprises. It is dangerous to sermonize on these events, no matter how carefully we analyze the situation. After their success these restless men disappeared, sinking away in the grave like everyone else. But what did all this have to do with the revelation of God's righteousness? For one thing, those who wanted to learn about God's righteousness by studying history would have a hopeless task. Job had reported the facts. It should have meant an end to their sermonizing. His friends should have abandoned their cocoon of fancy theories and test his words for truth. Could they prove him wrong? He challenged them to try it!

The friends were not poor; they had their own "way of life" and their own "wisdom", as their support and comfort. Job, however, had nothing. He could not even find God anymore.

9. Bildad's "Yes, But..."

(25: 1-6)

The hard hitting nearly merciless speech of Job on the chaos in our world had a far greater impact on the friends than they dared to admit even themselves. This is certainly one of the darkest and most terrifying chapters of the book. Most exegetes have been at a loss when they come to this chapter. Many have tried the old trick of rearranging verses or whole paragraphs to come up with a so-called reasonable version. They claim that all of Job's speech has been "erroneously" ascribed to him, rather than to Zophar. We will not spend much time on such philosophical philandering. Other interpreters propose the addition of the words, "So you say" for Job's vehement statements of chapter twenty four, as an indication that he was really responding to these as the words of the friends. Ofcourse where the context allows for such a method, it might be used with care, but it does not appear to be the appropriate explanation here.

It would be better to leave Job's devastating speech exactly the way it is, just as we had to leave the imprecatory song of chapter three. We must resist our stubborn desire to reduce the Scriptures to a sugar coated placebo. Only then can we find a blessing in chapter twenty four. The gospel shines through but the reader must avoid the temptation to put on blinders. Job may appear to have suffered from myopia when we put on our New Testament glasses, but we will never fully understand the secret of salvation in Christ, if we have not first tasted the bitterness of Job 24.

Job's friends appeared to be amazed at the energy of his response. Zophar did not give

any further answer, and Eliphaz has finished giving his views. Only Bildad made one last attempt.

His response revealed him to be a tired fighter. Perhaps by now he had realized the cruelty of his breach of God's rule for friendship. Perhaps he was making a feeble attempt to set things right, except he did not know how. His method seemed impoverished, particularly in view of Job's misery and view of reality.

Bildad seemed tired. He could not understand where Job got his energy. Perhaps Job did not even know that himself. Bildad wanted to respond, but he had nothing more to say. The only thing left was his miserable attempt to cover the retreat of the friends. While Job regarded himself to be on the edge of death, his strength was constantly renewed, but the strong and healthy Bildad was deadly tired by now. He could only gather energy for a very brief response, if one could even call it that. Bildad had no new insights to share. He stuck with the old claims.

"Yes, but..." he said. It was about as bland as it could get. For the umpteenth time he repeated the one-sided falsifying teaching about the greatness of God, and tried to connect with Job's inflammatory presentation of the disorder in the human world.

"Dominion and awe belong to God;

He establishes order in the heights of Heaven." (vs 2)

Job might have referred to him as a God who delayed justice, but you should have noticed the heavens, where there had never been disorder; there we would find only harmony. He might have said that peace was not to be found on earth, but one look at the heavens would show there to be peace.

But did this argument truly help Job? Was this a response to Job's view? Bildad had unravelled the relation between heaven and earth, and pointed to that as a message for Job. Bildad continued with his proclamation of God's greatness: His command of legions of angels; His forces were too many to number. Job knew of it, but saw no comfort in it. For him it only increased his awareness of disaster on earth. "Upon whom does his light not rise?"(vs 3b). The light of God triumphs over all.

As we listen carefully to the apparent piety of this argument, we begin to appreciate Bildad's confusion. If God were so great, no one could be righteous in His eyes. Bildad ignored the fall. He was inclined rather, to ascribe human corruption to his creatureliness. How could one be clean if one was born of a woman? This sounds familiar; we have heard it before. It was really no argument. Eliphaz used it in 15: 14-16, and even in 4:17 he had hinted at it. But now our attention is drawn to the difference: in chapters four and fifteen Eliphaz spoke of angels, just

as Bildad in this passage referred to legions of angels. Now he also spoke of the moon and stars. He may be using poetic expression, but we also need to consider another possibility. Bildad's contrast with the moon and stars placed a special emphasis on the impurity of all created things. Moreover, he seemed to succumb to paganizing thoughts when he connected the world of stars and that of angels. The temptation to blend revealed truth with human wisdom seems to have played a trick on Bildad.

Once Bildad had proclaimed the impurity of the creation it was easy for him to go on with a proclamation regarding human impurity. But in so doing he forgot the distinction between creation and fall, and he denied the works of God.

“If even the moon is not bright
and the stars are not pure in his eyes,
how much less man, who is but a maggot -
a son of man, who is only a worm!” (vs 5,6)

It all sounded so pious. But when we look closely we notice how little divine wisdom it contained. His speech was no answer to Job's lament; Bildad really had very little good to say about God. Throughout all this we note the tiredness of Bildad; and perhaps a little kindness. Bildad meant well, and he no longer offered direct accusations. But his arguments were twisted and he missed the mark.

At this point the friends have come to the end of their wisdom. They had completed the bankruptcy of their wisdom. It would appear that they too were aware of it, because they stopped arguing. It was time for some sound orthodoxy to take over. But first Job would give the friends one more answer.

10. Job Mocked the Wisdom of His Friends

(26: 1-4)

Job noticed of course that the friends were wearying in their attack. But an indomitable faithfulness to the truth sustained him. With great care and attention Job analyzed Bildad's thoughts. He included himself in the analysis and under the circumstance that seemed justified. His criticism took on a tone of friendly irony and thereby proved to be devastating. Job encouraged Bildad to look at the person who was totally without possessions, position, friends, means and place in society and who received no comfort from God. Could anyone have been poorer than that? Well, that was Job! And Job thanked his friends for all their comfort and help, their fearless and unwavering support. They must have felt very proud of their efforts at helping Job.

Bildad had said that the person before him lacked wisdom and he might have been right because Job could not find God and no longer understood his ways. All the while poor Bildad offered good advice and Job should have gained insight from his words of superior revelation. At least he should have declared Bildad's pronouncements marvelous. He had almost become a great prophet.

Then Job pleaded that Bildad would pay attention to the context of his words. What did he know of the spirit of his sermonizing? Why didn't he pause to think for a moment, was this godly wisdom or was it his own? They were not identical. The contradiction was dimetrical. His wisdom did not come from on high; he lacked true spirituality.

11. Job's Glorious Song of Praise **(26: 5 - 14)**

Then suddenly and quite unexpectedly, Job began to praise the Lord with all his might. We might say that he attempted to correct Bildad's meagre praise, which in fact was only false praise. We may also conclude that Job was making another triumphant conquest of faith. To our surprise, though not our consternation, we hear a song of praise from Job that breathed the very spirit of the words whereby God justified himself when he answered Job in a thunderstorm.⁵⁵

Job had already reached his goal. He had arrived where the Lord wanted him. He praised the Lord with all his might. He no longer asked for justice but was completely focussed on the omnipotence of God.

We might consider this song to be the climax of the book of Job, because in glory and elevation his words equaled those spoken by God in the marvellous discussion he would hold with Job.

How could Job possibly have been praising the Lord? He was the one who now amounted to nothing and who possessed nothing; a man of human and spiritual poverty, being so poor that it could not get any worse!

How was that possible? No one knows! But it happened! Without pretention or possession Job praised the Lord with an abundant and deep happiness. It appeared impossible yet it happened!

As we listen to this wonderful song of praise, one of the most beautiful that has ever been sung, we first of all hear Job speak of God's power over the dead. Bildad spoke of the highest heaven as God's domain and of peace and order in the world of angels. Job contrasted God's power over the realm of the dead, to which he himself expected to go soon. From in the depths the dead noticed God's holiness and would become restless. They shivered in the fear of the Lord. When the dead became aware of him and shuddered they certainly witnessed to his greatness. The realm of the dead was not closed to God. Later his own Son would descend into it. He beheld the place of decay and was not afraid to look into it.

God's power and majesty also took effect on earth. Thinking about creation Job said,

"He spreads out the northern skies over empty space;
He suspends the earth over nothing." (26:7).

Job had some knowledge of the earth floating freely in open space and expressed that in the language of his day. Thus he presented a religious worldview which was to become the foundation for other world views that made any sense. God suspended the earth over nothing. The joyous sounds of the eternal song of praise continued.

“[God] wraps up the waters in his cloud,
Yet the clouds do not burst under their weight.” (vs 8).

This representation might seem a little naive; we could compare it with the views of other ancient people which does not mean that we could do without this hymn of Job to give meaning to our modern “sophisticated” way of thinking.

As Job continued his song it reached unknown heights. Job was actively solving his own problem, but did not seem to notice it. One of the most remarkable aspects of this book is Job’s repeated reaching out beyond himself to the source of his salvation, yet also sinking back again into his misery. It may be helpful if we reflect on this phenomenon in our own life of faith. Our own struggle of faith will take on its own peculiar form. In the life of faith there is steady progress; sometimes it suddenly bursts into bloom and progress can be dramatic. More frequently growth follows a timely pattern.

Yet God’s revelation presents us with something exalted. Moses attained more insight than Gideon, Job saw more than Hezekiah although Gideon came after Moses and Hezekiah came after Job. Job’s life reflects an anticipation of faith towards knowledge which actually belongs to the New Testament era. What is even more remarkable about this song of praise is that Job already seemed to know the things which he could only truly acquire after the Lord Himself had repeated the words to him. Similarly there are people who already in their childhood years can come to know what they *re*-discover in old age about the great works of God. Yet it takes many years of their life before they are able to make that re-discovery. But such a discovery coincides with reminders and renewed interest for the faith that moved them in their youth.

As Job began to speak about God’s throne: “He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it”(KJV26:9), he came close to the prophecy of the book of Revelation.⁵⁶

In a sense this developed a naive description of clouds as a cover, hiding God’s throne from our view. But it also gives a unique perspective. We cannot help but think of Psalm 97:2,

⁵⁵ See chapter 38.

⁵⁶ See KJV Revelation 20:11

“Clouds and thick darkness surround him”. Only when we manage to free ourselves from the traditional separation between “matter” and “Spirit”, (a false separation) are we able to understand such a passage of Scriptures. Job probably knew very well the naïveté of considering the rainclouds as covering above God’s throne. And he certainly did not mean to use this term as “poetic imagery”. Job was less foolish than modern interpreters of poetry. The clouds around God’s throne were both material and spiritual just as the horizon had both spatial and spiritual denotation; we must separate the figurative from the literal meaning.

Around God’s throne were clouds and darkness. Here Job alluded to the secrets of God. He also talked about his own life, for he could no longer find God because of the clouds and darkness around the throne. This was how Job had solved his own problem before the Lord spoke to him from a thunderstorm.

“He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters
for a boundary between light and darkness. (vs.10)

Here we find an idea which we meet repeatedly in ancient wisdom: in his acts of creation the Lord set boundaries gave laws and enforced ordinances. The ancient schools of wisdom loved to proclaim such ideas, while our modern western philosophies and theologies (not excluding the orthodox ones) never seem to remember that the Lord has set his ordinances as a cosmic boundary between Himself and His creation; these ordinances originated with Him and never betray their origin; as laws they remain effective and He, the Lawgiver, remains faithful to them.

God is greater than His creation.

“The pillars of the heavens quake,
aghast at his rebuke.” (vs. 11)

With His power he quieted the sea, unrestrained as it was. He cut Rahab, a mythological monster, to pieces. Job surely did not believe in Rahab’s existence. But, as we also saw from chapter three, the writers of Scriptures may well have used mythical figures to illustrate God’s greatness. This was more than a literary stylistic matter, for behind idolatrous portrayal of the gods the Scriptures recognized the activities of the Evil One. This is why we interpret the prophecies of Job in the light of God’s victory over the power of Satan. Both Rahab and the slippery serpent represented mythical figures related to the seething anger of the sea. Thus the Bible teaches about the demonic character of its waters. Job’s experience had taught him about the ocean of a demonized creation. His own children had died from a satanic storm. But he seemed to know as well that the Lord would triumph over the powers of darkness. The storms in

human hearts and the storms at sea were connected by one and the same activity of the Evil One. Here too we see that a separation between the “material” and the “spiritual” was a rather foolish Modernist invention.

Job concluded with a word that reached far beyond the acceptable limits of our home-grown and trivializing exegesis. Look,

“...these are but the outer fringes of his works;

How faint the whisper we hear of him!

Who then can understand the thunder of his power?” (vs.14)

The extent of the meaning of these words was shown, first of all, from its being God’s word and, secondly, by the placement of the book of Job within the wisdom literature. God’s commands, including this one, are usually very broad: we must believe that all our knowledge, whether that be scientific knowledge or the much deeper and richer knowledge of faith, can see little more than the edges of God’s ways with us and can hear but a faint echo of His footsteps. That leads us to modesty. Woe to us if we try to reduce God’s Word to fit the limitations of impoverished theological constructions. That is like taking intellectual steroids to boost sinful pride; human folly at its worst.

Thus ended Job’s glorious song of praise. And he was not even aware that with these words he had already provided the definitive answers to all his questions. Similarly, faithful readers of the Bible today often do not realize that they already know all things; that they have already obtained all the answers to their burning questions; that they already attained the victory in their own spiritual struggle.

12. Job Swore an Oath

(27:1-6)

Job's song of praise presented far more than a correction of Bildad's impoverished theology, for it already contained the true solution to Job's own problem. But Job immediately continued by declaring under oath that he wanted to maintain his blamelessness. It almost seems disappointing. Had Job forgotten his own song of praise?

To answer this question we have to remember two things. First, Job had just made an enormous discovery of faith, bigger even than the previous one. Yet, in this conquest he stood so utterly alone that he hardly dared to appropriate it. He still badly needed the discussion with God with which the book would end. Secondly, the search for truth was still going on. Even if Bildad's presentation was brief and very tempered, he was nevertheless still opposing Job's claim to innocence. He had stood in judgement of Job and Job could not accept that, nor should he have.

Those who face a real struggle and fear the loss of life appreciate their friends all the more; with them, at least, they can be open. When friends no longer accept them, everything is lost. We are not just speaking of heroes of faith; in fact the whole concept of 'heroes of faith' may have been a pagan invention. However, if we were ever tempted to elect one it should be Job. Of course, it would still be wrong, for Job received all his energy and his prophetic vision as a perfect gift from God. It was really never his own. His struggle resulted from God's intervention and nothing was ever said about Job reflecting on his own heroism. Reading the book of Job in a much later time period, we may be surprised by the great works of God revealed in Job's life. Job had every reason to consider his life almost finished and this struggle as his last.

In such circumstances human nature looks for the assistance of any and all available means. It calls on self-knowledge, not rejecting or discarding any resources, even in turning inward in the attempt to understand and explain one's lot in life; it calls for discernment, feeling, sympathy, vision, poetry, prophecy, suppositions and, while reaching out for the unknown, the realization that there is but one way; going right through the darkness that cannot be described or shared. In their great struggle and suffering, believers may well say things which sound foolish but contain a core of wisdom which is often not appreciated until after their death. It is also possible that they can do no more than cry aloud, with a lament which defeats all effort of understanding. Not every person who suffers is like Job, although all God's suffering children have something in common with him. The most remarkable thing about Job was that, to the very

end, he kept his wits about him; in all his misery his thoughts were not confused and his mind did not break down.

We must keep in mind that Job's story was composed by poets who lived many centuries later. But there had to have been something to record in the first place! Throughout those intervening centuries, the verbal tradition must have carried an intelligible and astonishing content which could only be traced back to the faithful labours of this blameless servant of the Lord.

No matter how weak Bildad's final argument may have been, it proved that his friends had no intention of stopping their opposition. They did not want to hear the truth. It should be remembered that Job, like anyone who suffers, focussed his attention on his own lot in life. Such attention may well appear to have been egocentric. Yet we see here that Job gave his wonderful song of praise *first*, before resuming his discussion with his friends.

He proceeded with perfect clarity, swearing an oath to guarantee the truth of his position. His friends were probably surprised at the solemnity of this oath,

“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.” (Job 27:1-4)

It is hard to misinterpret his formulation of the oath. To affirm his sincerity Job continued by repeating his conviction,

I will never admit you are in the right;
til 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.” (vs 5,6)

We said that every believer who suffers may be compared to Job but we must make one distinction. The Lord Himself spoke of Job as one who was blameless and upright, shunning all evil. This could not be said of any other person except Christ. Indeed, it is true that all those

whose lives have been anchored in Christ have also been justified; it is also true that Job needed the merit of Christ for his salvation. Just the same, there has been no one else of whom we can say what Job was permitted to say about himself,

“My heart does not reproach any of my days.” (NASB 27:6b). In chapter 31 we will find Job’s judgement of himself worked out in great detail; at every stage he invoked a curse upon himself should he have been lying, thus using the oath in a different form.

None of this negates the fact that every Christian believer may and should plead for his right.

13. God Would Serve Justice

(27:7-23)

Several motifs or themes keep coming back in this book, each time with a slightly different meaning. Already in chapter five Eliphaz spoke of a need for restoration, assuming that Job was more guilty than most. At a later stage in the book, Job was indeed restored.

At the end of chapter eight, Bildad also mentioned Job’s restoration, as did Zophar in chapter eleven. The complaint which Job had first uttered in chapter three, kept coming back in following chapters. The friends repeatedly emphasized that the godless would be punished. While the friends often spoke of God’s majesty and came close to confessing God’s sovereignty, Job demonstrated a complete recognition of that sovereignty in chapter 26; in the final chapters the story will focus altogether on God’s sovereignty.

On this occasion Job himself spoke of judgement on those who had forgotten God. He appeared to repeat the same theme as the friends but there was a difference: Job’s conviction that the godless would be judged represented an extension of his call for justice. He was speaking in particular about the prosperity of the godless of his day, (see chapter 21) and the chaos in the human world (see chapter 24). The discussion in this chapter about the judgement that awaits the godless should be understood in that light.

The commentators have often been at a loss regarding chapter 27:7-23. Even careful scholars have been inclined to suggest the dangerous method of rearranging the text. Such drastic emendation of the text to the extent of ascribing Job’s words to someone else, far exceeds the limits of responsible textual criticism. There is no need to ascribe part of chapter 27 to Zophar. His silence during the third round of speeches could have been motivated by his anger

towards Job. Zophar went so far that he *could* not have participated in the ‘third round’.

We must not succumb to such drastic methods. Chapter 27, through long tradition, has come to us as a speech of Job. His earlier discussion of the prosperity of the godless and the chaotic relationships among human beings should not be seen as a reason to prevent him from speaking of the judgement of the godless in this chapter. We should not forget that he had just completed a song of praise concerning God’s sovereignty. To be sure, he maintained his blamelessness, a theme that his friends could not understand at all and with which even we, the modern readers, have difficulty. As it is, when we press for the real meaning of this book we find ourselves asking again and again how any *one* person could truly say of himself, “my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live” (27:6b). But we recall that in earlier chapters God Himself in speaking with Satan, provided evidence that there was no one like Job upon the earth (1;8; 2:3). We must take very seriously this witness of God Himself. Job was indeed peerless and we can only understand the book of Job if we remember this.

The biblical accounts for all the major players contained stories of their sins, often very serious ones: Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, to mention only a few. The church of Jesus Christ has always confessed that every descendant of Adam was conceived and born in sin. That was true for Job too. Yet of Job it was said that he was blameless. This can lead us to only one conclusion, namely that, even before his incarnation, the work of Christ was so powerful that a sinful being could grow up blameless and needed to ‘reproach none of his days’.

Thus Job began speaking at great length about the godless and the judgement that would come upon them. He separated himself from them.

“May my enemies be like the wicked,
my adversaries like the unjust!” (vs 7)

Thus he affirmed his innocence which baffled his friends. It did seem a bit much, didn’t it?

Next Job spoke at great length about judgement. He knew that this judgement had not yet come and he had struggled with the problem of its delay. But now, at last, he could confess his belief: judgement would be coming, and through the eyes of this new-found conviction he wanted to see God’s enemies.

So Job testified that the unbeliever could not delight in God. He was not used to calling on the name of the Lord and did not have that special relationship of the believer with his God: namely, the communion of faith. This was what Job wanted to teach his friends. It was an instruction they could accept. Indeed, one day God would serve justice and His judgement would then touch the godless. How foolish of the friends that they should have wished to apply that

judgement to him now.

Job was right! It has always been foolish to remind a believer about the coming judgement; for the mark of believers has always been that they would *not* come under God's judgement. We too know that judgement will come and at times we can already see it. But even if we do not see it we may be assured that judgement will come over those who have forgotten God. It will affect not only their children and their possessions and their deepest inner selves. Yet this is only visible by faith, and that is what the friends have forgotten.

14. The Praise of Wisdom (28:1-28)

The famous, though sometimes poorly translated, 28th chapter of the book of Job gives us the praise of wisdom. This marks the book as one of the 'chokmatic' books, in other words, part of the wisdom literature of ancient Israel. We also read about the praise of Wisdom in Proverbs; indeed there are numerous proverbs of such praise so that it at times appears somewhat excessive. Lacking wisdom ourselves, we are tempted to ascribe such excesses to Jewish tastes and styles. But wisdom is so precious and necessary that such, even somewhat extravagant, praise is still fully justified.

According to some, chapter 28 speaks of a hidden wisdom. That is incorrect. Careful reading of this chapter reveals that a wisdom which is hidden is not the issue here. It does speak of how precious, and therefore scarce, wisdom is. But neither chapter 28 nor any other part of the Scriptures, teaches that Wisdom cannot be found. This chapter does, however, deal with a wisdom that remains hidden from mankind, inasmuch as it is not meant for them; and it speaks of wisdom that is accessible because God's revelation makes it available.

We could ask how chapter 28 is related to that which preceded and that which follows it. The easy way out for this question is to ascribe it to a different author, perhaps even a different period of time. Already, with our methodological principles for this study, we noted that the book of Job had more than one author. This does not necessarily imply that the book of Job lacks internal cohesion and unity. On the contrary, the various authors, even those from different generations, must have exercised such intensive cooperation that they produced a book which maintained a single focus.

In spite of what we just said, we should realize that the inner cohesion may not be as

tightly woven as we, with our western world expectations, might desire. Not that we wish to suggest that the Scriptures are limited by a (middle) eastern mind set. There is no room for such an exegetically unsound conclusion. The Word of God is capable of breaking through the human cultural forms in which it has been given. When we examine the book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes or even the Song of Songs (a book written by women, by the way) we find there a structure which is not as closely woven as we might expect. So we may anticipate a similar looseness of structure in the book of Job. Not that it is likely, however, because the book is closely based on history. But it is quite absurd to assume that chapter 28 or even the whole discussion of Elihu, might have an origin independent of the rest of the book. Those who read the book in this manner blind themselves to its obvious truths.

The praise of wisdom fits very well with the preceding and subsequent sections. One need not force the issue; on the contrary, by neglecting the connection one violates the meaning of the book. In the preceding section Job had spoken of the judgement on the godless which he had not seen, yet accepted in faith. In relation to this Job spoke of instruction.

“I will teach you about the power of God;
the way of the Almighty I will not conceal.” (27:11)

Job gave a lesson in faith which he continued in chapter 28. In addition, Job on numerous occasions accused his friends of foolishness. (see 12:2,13:4, 16:3, 21:34 and 26:4). Therefore there was now every reason for him to speak about wisdom.

This discussion on wisdom elicited no answers from the friends. They had nothing else to say. The praise of wisdom thus became a soliloquy of Job, sharing this characteristic with chapters 29, 30 and 31. Not that Job, deep in thought and oblivious to his friends, was just talking to himself. On the contrary, the praise of wisdom was directed toward his friends just as his reminiscing about earlier happiness, his complaints about his present suffering and his forceful expression of innocence were meant for their ears.

Job began by talking about the underground mining operations as a portrayal of human intelligence and bravery. Throughout his discourse we find the idea of the great value given to wisdom, as if acquired (mined) in the same manner as precious metals. Two concepts dominate in this part of chapter 28: first, that human intelligence did not suffice for finding wisdom which was far more valuable than anything human beings could acquire; and secondly, that human beings through bravery and brains, coupled with a desire for riches, had found pathways unknown to animals.

Here too the ‘spiritual’ and ‘material’ factors overlapped. For the place where precious

stones, silver or gold and even base metals might have been found was just as hidden as the place where wisdom was located. With precious metals and stones humans had been making ornaments, with copper and iron they made tools and weapons. Ornaments, tools and weapons have been proof and evidence of clever management and human ingenuity. One could have referred to mines as the place where ingenuity was to be found. Yet wisdom could not be found there.

Mortals have underestimated its value. They have known the value of metals and precious stones but not the value of wisdom for it has never been for sale.

“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....
...the price of wisdom is beyond rubies.” (28:14,15,18b)

Anything precious in the land of the living was still altogether inadequate in obtaining wisdom.

“Where then does wisdom come from?” (vs.20)

There is much overlap between this passage in praise of wisdom and what is said of Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Wisdom was described as the architect of the world who played before God’s presence. She has been invisible to all living creatures; she was beyond human ken and supernatural. Even the birds, whose flight many pagans have used to decipher the directions of wisdom, didn’t own wisdom. Neither did the underworld or abode of the dead know it. Job was familiar with pagan forms of worship and must have known of the beliefs regarding wisdom’s origins in the depth of the earth; as if Hades could have been a storehouse of wisdom or that death or the dead should have possessed it. That was not true according to Job. Destruction and death could say at most, “Only a rumour of it has reached our ears” (vs 22). But it was not found with them. In other words, death and the realm of the dead did witness to the wisdom of God, to the extent that the judgement over the world which resulted in death, stemmed from His wisdom. But the realm of the dead was certainly not an original source of wisdom.

The human wisdom needed for daily living is a gift from God and he knows its dwelling place (vs 23). He knows all things and rules all things. Just as in chapter 26, God is here revealed as a sovereign Creator who sets limits and boundaries for the wind, water, lightning and the rain. Indeed God’s wisdom is revealed precisely in this sovereign and creative setting of boundaries.

God perceives and fathoms wisdom. It is His very own wisdom and she is divine. He

decrees His laws for His entire creation. He also provides human beings with laws for religion, saying, “The fear of the Lord - that is wisdom,” (vs.28a) as the right response to the laws decrees and ordinances which he has given. Such human wisdom corresponds to God’s wisdom and all those who receive God’s wisdom are called ‘gods’. The wisdom that is derived from God and maintained through fearing Him, elevates humanity far above the rest of creation. “...and to shun evil is understanding” (vs 28b).

In this verse we see a connection with what God Himself had said regarding Job. He was upright and pious and shunning all evil. In the praise of wisdom, Job summarized his whole perspective on the world. His view, like any worldview, was fully spiritual knowledge. Since Job’s world view was based on God’s self-revelation, it represented true religion. Job’s poverty was three-fold; through loss of family and position; by having to face angry apposition of his friends who betrayed the “fear of the Lord”(see 6:14); and by having lost the knowledge of the dwelling of the Lord. This bankrupt man spoke about wisdom. Therefore his words embodied both Law and Gospel. He already possessed the very wisdom he was seeking but did not yet realize it.

15. Remembering Former Joy (chapter 29)

Job did not know that he had already found the wisdom, which was the solution to all his problems. This created further complications in the mistaken idea that if the fear of the Lord guaranteed a life of peace and happiness, Job, as a pious person, could not have been robbed of both. Yet many of God’s children have lost their joy in the midst of spiritual and ecclesiastical discussions which were sabotaged by foolish decisions; they felt very keenly the loss of joy in belonging to a church family. Some have even died from sorrow over broken church relationships. This was the very loss experienced by Job in the discussions with his friends. The irony of the situation was that they blamed Job for not experiencing the joy of salvation, as if the one who had lost that joy could not be truly pious!

This was the poison which undermined all his relationships.

He realized that he had lost the way of communion with God. This was not to say that people of the Old Testament saw God’s blessing primarily in material wealth. On several occasions we have noted that we could not distinguish spiritual and material blessings here as clearly as we might have assumed from the influence of our misguided modern wisdom. Yet the

joy of salvation was taken away from Job. He could no longer find God.

Job was mistaken but that was, primarily, due to the limited vision available to him. Only since Jesus Christ has borne the full weight of poverty with loss of the joy of salvation, especially when he descended into hell, has it become clear that the believer is never reduced to complete poverty and is never fully separated from God. Whether in prison or hospital, or with the breakdown of our human dignity, we will still not be so much impoverished as Jesus once was. Perhaps Jesus, in his youth, learned obedience from the book of Job. This book may have shown him the way of desolation and poverty, a road he later walked to the very end. Job 29 is a chapter of sorrow in which Job mourned his lost happiness.

Some may flaunt their misery and may even find some deranged enjoyment in their pain; but apart from such perversion, we are not forbidden to have feelings of sadness. Anyone who takes religion seriously knows about sorrow. He experiences a mourning for a lost paradise; the loss of youthful strength and energy; the lost peace and joy of years gone by or the fear of impending death.

Job's melancholy was starkly defined. Once a happy man, he had become filled with bitterness. Was it obstinacy? Some of what he had said would or could not be acceptable to ordinary orthodox believers.

We can understand his melancholy against a background of his blamelessness. He was not a totally sinless person, and never pretended to be one. He knew of unrighteousness and reconciliation, yet could also say, "My heart will not reproach me, as long as I live." (27:6b). Then he began to speak about the days of his life.

Those were the days when God had protected him, when God's lamp shone upon his head and he had walked in darkness by His light. Those had been the highpoints of his life when he had experienced God's intimate friendship (see 29:1-4).

With these words Job began to describe the days of his former happiness. He knew that there were also dark periods in that time but God's lamp had illuminated his life and he had walked through the days of his life as someone carrying a lantern. His children were about him and "God's intimate friendship blessed [his] house"(vs.4). He had been a devout man living a blissful life. He had thrived on God's word-revelation as far as it was known at his time and in all that he did he had been conscious of the intimacy of God's word. It had been a good life.

He had been rich and a man of influence. Eliphaz, who in chapter 22 had considered him morally one with the godless people around him, was dead wrong. Job did not hide the fact that he had been an influential person. Even while living outside the city on his estate, he had

participated in the public life of the city. He had been recognized as one having authority and had been respected for his judgements. When Job used to come to the gate of the city, the young men had stepped aside and the old men had risen to their feet (vs 8).

We suspect that Job had been neither a citizen nor a government official of the city to which he referred. He was simply Job. People had valued his viewpoint and asked for his advice. They had respected his input. In his contact with the people of the city, Job had exercised his religion. His political involvement has been based on faith. He had participated in the affairs of the city but without being an integral member of it. Eliphaz had no right to consider Job a pagan among pagans.

Moreover, Job had also opposed the corrupt situations of his day. He had cared for the helpless and had represented them before the courts. He had rescued those without influence and spoken up for the rights of the orphans. He had alleviated needs and had proven his social conscience.

Thus we are learning something of the influence of the man from Uz as he had lived in a disintegrating society. We are amazed. We have read concerning Abraham that, together with other powerful potentates from his region, he had gathered a large army and defeated a division of the army of Kedorlaomer.⁵⁷ But Job's stature was greater. He had acquired for himself a place of honour in a society to which he did not even belong. He had intervened in both the public and the private affairs of the nearby city. He had been influential and his intervention had been kindly and wise. Only wrongdoers could have regarded him as a threat.

Job's friends had likely known about his remarkable position; but they probably had not understood much of it. For us too, it seems unbelievable. We are familiar with the independent patriarch; we know of rulers and subjects; but we know only one person from the Bible who was an independent shepherd on a large scale and who at the same time influenced a civic community of which he was probably neither a citizen nor a leader.

We usually think of Job only as the man who, before his misery began, had a large, closely knit family. But there was a lot more to him. He was a man who practiced statecraft based on his religious convictions; who cared for the needy and protected the despised and downtrodden. Everyone had liked to listen to him and yet he remained a stranger. He had practised real influence without being part of the ruling aristocracy.

As Job was thinking about his lost happiness, he also thought about the loss of his unusual but honoured position. It was as if such a social loss had hurt him as much as the loss of

wealth, children and friendship. But in all his mournful reflection he, first of all, remembered that in those days God's

“...lamp shone above my head,

and by his light I walked through darkness!” (vs.3)

“...when God' intimate friendship blessed my house,” (vs.4b)

This too had come to an end.

16. Job's Complaint about His Loss of Prestige (chapter 30)

It is not incorrect for God's children to complain about losing respect. They are children of the King, even if they do not look like royalty. Job's former position had had something regal about it. Even without being a subject or ruler in the city, his authority had been recognized. He had wielded his influence not only in support of the poor and powerless, defending them in lawsuits, but also in political affairs. Job regarded this as a blessing, but a blessing which had flowed naturally from the deep, spiritual blessing within the bond of the Lord's covenant. Through his closeness to God, his life had blossomed, as it were 'naturally', to its royal status. Job knew that he, as a child fallen in Adam, had also forfeited that gift which he had received back by grace. He also understood that this covenantal grace renewed his life in such a way that fame, happiness, prosperity and power became the natural fruits of his walk with God.

That is why, in chapter 29, he spoke of God's care and friendship, and his lamp and light. The examples of his human influence and greatness were like fruits of his protected and God-illuminated life.

Now all these fruits had been destroyed. Such a loss has always destroyed the close relation between people and the world they inhabit. It is in this world that our lives take shape. Imprisonment is a punishment especially because the one incarcerated has lost his relationships with others in the world. Job's misery partly consisted in the loss of his material surroundings, his money, property, house and home near the city. He also lost his human contacts: his servants, acquaintances and associates. He had become an outcast. Although his friends came to visit him, they violated the rule for friendship by their heartless and hateful talk. He lost his sharing of faith with them and became completely lonely.

⁵⁷ See Genesis 14

Destruction had even affected his body as well as his relationship with God. He assumed that he already had one foot in the grave. His relation to God had become embittered because he did not obtain the justice that God Himself had guaranteed, nor could he find his way to God's dwelling place.

Within the context of this desolation he pursued the works of God. He wanted to bring his case before God and called on God as a witness against Himself. He committed himself to the Redeemer who would come and predicted that he *would* see God even without his body. He praised the Lord who always does all that pleases Him. He praised the great value of that human wisdom that had a divine origin.

These were beautiful victories of faith but they did not seem to help Job himself. He did not have the strength to take a share for himself. He was not even aware that he had made conquests of faith unequalled by anyone in his time. He had trouble even holding on to these victories; they kept slipping from his grasp. He knew that in his blissful past life he had walked with God, but all that had disappeared. For him the present seemed a wasteland. His world had disintegrated; his existence was contaminated to the core.

Now he would witness to his loss and return to the complaint of the third chapter, proving that the complaint of the deprecatory or cursing song remained a central motif in the book of Job. It was not to be the last word, mind you. But it was part of Job's blamelessness and would resonate in the heart of every Christian. God's children always deplore a loss of respect and therefore complain in the context of faith. Had Job lost his faith, he would not have complained but would have lapsed into dull resignation. And in that case Satan would have won!

Job knew no peace. He spoke with great agitation about the destruction which had come. He had been reduced to nothing. Outcasts whose fathers would have been rejected as day labourers on Job's former estate, now despised him.

“But now they mock me, men younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to put up with my sheep dogs” (30:1)

Good-for-nothings taunted him and mocked him. Job walked a road of loneliness and darkness deeper than anyone had ever experienced before; the same road which only the Saviour of all mankind would some day travel the entire way.

Job had not, after all, known the fullness of loneliness and sorrow. God had ordered Satan to spare his life! Jesus Christ, the most excellent Son of God, travelled in complete

loneliness the path through the depths of death itself. Every evil sensed by Job in his despair, Christ overcame.

Thus the righteousness of Job's complaint has been clearly revealed. At the same time he was beginning to get stuck in his argumentation and required a clearcut turning point towards repentance. His complaints came to a dead end. He could only get back on track by claiming his calling and election by grace. And he did that, but only after carrying his complaint to the bitter end.

17. Job Declared His Innocence (chapter 31)

Chapter 31 contains the last speech of Job. Once more he proclaimed his innocence with the greatest emphasis. More than one of his assertions resembled an oath. This seems to indicate that Job continued to consider himself as blameless. The reader has the guarantee of Job's blamelessness from God's own words in 1:8 and 2:3. It does not automatically follow that we can apply Job's innocence to the way he reacted while in distress, particularly with respect to his answers to his friends. Most exegetes would say that we should not consider him 'blameless' during his trials but, rather, see part of his responses as a stumbling on his part, reflecting if not outright unbelief, at least little faith. This would tie in with our discussions in the following part of the book of Job, the speeches of Elihu. God's strong correction of Job which resulted in his repentance in sackcloth and ashes (42:6) and in his nullifying his words,⁵⁸ would seem to support this viewpoint.

Yet, now we face the fact that God Himself said of his servant Job that he had spoken well of Him (42:8). It would be impossible and irresponsible to try to resolve this 'contradiction' by means of an analytical approach. It would also be irresponsible to use the cop-out: 'here we face a mystery'. Indeed, we are always faced with mystery, particularly the secret of our createdness and our religious fellowship with God. But this cannot be used as a reason for giving up the attempt to understanding this issue. The Word of God is the announcement of his love and whoever gives up the quest to understand it is guilty of disobedience in faith.

We must also consider that the progressive development of Job's growth in faith has meaning both for the history of salvation and as an example for us. Jesus Christ also learned

about obedience from the book of Job. He completed to perfection the suffering experienced by Job. Both of these factors focus our attention on the history of redemption, though not exclusively. With respect to the exemplary factor, every follower of Christ, in thankfulness to God for his salvation, is instructed through the book of Job regarding his own miserable condition. Such instruction is based on the community in faith and congeniality of spirit regardless of the great differences in time between Job and today's reader.

How must we understand the second factor, that Job 'repented' of his words and yet was praised by God Himself for having spoken well of the Lord?

We find the answer in the book of Job itself, in the final chapters which we have named "**A Talk With God**". But the preparation for this climax has been made with the the words of Elihu in "**Orthodox Intermezzo**". The last push towards this intermezzo was provided by Job himself as he continued on oath to proclaim his innocence.

To understand this oath, it is useful to remember that in all his discussions Job called on the Name of the Lord. He was really doing the work that is typical for the New Testament church. By calling on the Name of the Lord, Job proclaimed that Name throughout the world. God Himself made this invocation and proclamation of His Name a requirement to express his love. This has given the words of Scripture their unique and wonderfully incomprehensible authority. And this the church has been trying to comprehend in her exegesis in order to grasp the prize of God's calling and carry it away.

Job started his witness with this assurance, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." (31:1) This was a form of unquestionable righteousness not common among the people of Job's days nor of the Old Testament in general. It has always been very uncommon among Bible believers throughout the ages right up to today. Here too our appreciation of beauty must accept the demand for ethical obedience. A simple consideration could support us in this. Job experienced his humanity as an indivisible unity and therefore had no problem with placing moral limits on his eyes. This is exactly what we experience at the Lord's table as we 'taste and discern' that the Lord is good; the distinction between the 'literal' and 'figurative' sense of taste then becomes meaningless.

Job mentioned this covenant with his eyes as the first example which was followed by a description of God's concern for all human actions. That is why we may assume that verse 1 gave a general reflection of Job's moral standards. He considered various actions at which others would only shrug their shoulders, as unacceptable and to be avoided at all cost. Job totally

⁵⁸ Compare to Bk.II, chapter 11 and Bk.VI, chapter 6

rejected an attitude referring to our just being human as an excuse, “Does he not see my ways and count my every step?” (vs.4)

God has always watched over his fallen creatures and His attention never fails. He notes everything we do and evaluates all in detail. Therein lies both comfort and terror. Both terror and comfort.

Job continued by mentioning certain sins which he avoided. We suspect more and more that no other human being had come as close to the sinlessness of Christ, as Job. Yet we notice that Job confessed his sins.

“Let God weigh me in honest scales,
and he will know that I am blameless.” (vs.6)

Job confessed that he was altogether free from falsehood and deceit, yet he admitted that his heart had *not* followed his eyes and thereby admitted that his eyes had sinned (vs.7). This admission was implicit also in verse one in which he stated that he had made a contract with his eyes. Job’s claim to blamelessness was therefore not a claim to sinlessness. Both verses one and seven contain marvelous descriptions of how Job held himself accountable in his religious commitments. In spite of the unity of our human nature, all the children of Adam and Eve have experienced the division of the old and the new self. We might want to translate Job’s claim of innocence in this way: his ‘new humanity had complete control over his old self’. Inevitably that would mean that Job was fully aware of his old self. Verses 33 and 34 seem to have a similar claim.

“If I have concealed my sins as [Adam did],⁵⁹
by hiding my guilt in my heart
because I so feared the crowd
and so dreaded the contempt of the clans
that I kept silent and would not go outside” (vss 33,34)

To this we might add an oath like that of comments of self-condemnation in verses 8, 10, 22 or 40. Verses 33 and 34 may well refer to the public worship which had been held by Job and his people. Such public exercises of worship included praise of God and the admission of guilt by His servants. In this way Job admitted publicly that he was a sinner. He did not allow fear of the opinions of influential people around him to tempt him into hiding or avoiding public worship.

In Job’s day this was a very courageous thing to do, since pagan people found nothing

quite so objectionable as the admission of sin. Throughout the ages, those who are living as the righteous are pure in heart - and, against all opposition, Job maintained his righteousness before the Lord.

Yet, in public worship he also regularly confessed his sinfulness.

Verses 26 and 27 clearly show that Job lived in a pagan society; in these verses we are assured by Job that he had never bowed down before the heavenly bodies: sun, moon or stars. This, he maintained, would have been unrighteousness to be confessed before his judge. It was unlikely that the judges of his day could have regarded this as transgression. Job's confession anticipated what would become the normal situation in Israel.

Under oath Job assured us that he had never committed adultery any more than he had abused his slaves, treated helpless wanderers unmercifully, been greedy and stingy, or had cursed his enemies. He even included among the sins which he had avoided, the ravaging of the land (vss 38, 39), the exploitation of labourers or taking possession of land through shady dealings which would have resulted in the destitution of the previous owner.

Job swore his oaths but complained that no-one listened and that even God would not listen. He was ready to take action against the Lord and did not fear the outcome.

Thus his complaint was characterized by faith. Job maintained his innocence, yet also held fast to his Advocate. Similarly, his readers today can maintain their blamelessness because the Lord Himself has justified them.

18. Review

In this 'Gentler Conclusion' to the discussions with the friends, we noted that Zophar did not participate and Eliphaz and Bildad maintained their positions, albeit less vehemently and noticeably wearied. They may have been surprised by their own passion and attempted a return to the demands of normal friendship. Job had not ceased his protest against their mistaken point of view, and had attained new heights in his praise of God's sovereignty. In fact, in this way he had already found the solution to all his questions (ch. 26). He did not seem to have noticed this himself and continued his complaint that God was withholding judgement. Yet he also witnessed to his firm belief that in the end, God would do justice (ch.27).

After this the discussion turned into a monologue by Job, presumably taking place in the presence of his friends and others as we will soon see. Job spoke of the great value of human wisdom and its divine origin. With longing he remembered the joy he had lost and in all bitterness, complained about the endless poverty of his present condition. He could not find God anymore. In the end he witnessed with solemn oath to his blameless life while he nonetheless gave triple testimony to an innocence which he did not equate with sinlessness but obtained by grace.

IV. Orthodox Intermezzo

1. Introduction

Chapters 32-37 contain the speeches of Elihu. Many scholars have regarded this part as a later insert. This is possible even though not altogether necessary. This working hypothesis must not, however, lead to the conclusion that the book of Job had been robbed of its unity by such an insert. Nor is it necessary to insist on an insertion of the performance of Elihu as a later addition whereas in the original chapter 38 would have had to follow chapter 31. It seems more plausible to think of the book of Job as the work of several authors; like a Persian rug which, so they say, is started by one, continued by a second and finally completed by a third person. It does seem likely that a considerable time elapsed between the work of the various authors. There are, however, very convincing indications which incline us first of all, to accept that all of them used the same tradition and secondly, to accept that later editors had a very close knowledge of the work of earlier writers. If we, for instance, accept that Elihu's presentation was based on a different source than that of chapter 32, we must still note that the author of chapter 32 had very carefully integrated his portrayal by indicating that the young Elihu could no longer remain silent after hearing the fierce passion of chapter 31.

We speak of, 'the same tradition'. This part of the book of Job makes sense only when we accept Elihu as a historically authentic person. He was identified by mention of his place of birth and the name of his father or ancestor. Elihu may even have been a distant relative of Job. In that case, he belonged to the family of Job which, according to 19:4 had shown him but little compassion.

Elihu appeared to be a mild-mannered person. He was young, modest and spoke only because he could no longer remain silent. As a person he was totally different from the three friends. While the friends had continuously proclaimed a false concept of God and completely pagan notions of faith, Elihu's views proved to be more closely related to those of Job. This spiritual closeness may very well have been related to the line of the generations chosen by God to carry out His covenant. The fact that Elihu was not mentioned at the end of the book does not mean that the author of those chapters did not recognize him as one of the participants. The friends were mentioned at the end because they had endangered their lives by speaking evil of the Lord. Not being mentioned here may simply imply that Elihu's testimony did not bring God's

judgement on him.

Elihu belonged to the group of people who had gathered around Job and his friends. The three friends, because of their age, occupied the place of honour among the small group of people which had formed around Job in his desolation. Being much younger, Elihu belonged to the interested bystanders.

Before Elihu began to speak we find a brief description of the situation and a brief summary of his position. We ought to recognize 32:1-3 as a stage instruction in the drama. Elihu's position was that both Job and his friends were on the wrong track. In this the young man represented a healthy orthodoxy. We must note, however, that his judgement of Job and the friends remained quite one-sided. He criticized Job because he "justified himself rather than God" (32:2), or rather, "because he justified himself before the face of God".⁶⁰ This was certainly not a full depiction of Job's position. The reason why he found the three friends lacking is also noteworthy: "they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him." (32:3). Nowhere did he point out the false representations of God in the arguments of the friends! One-sidedness should not be equated with false representation. Elihu remained short-sighted for he presented one side of the issue, one which had received too little attention in the discussion with the friends. Job never specifically remarked on their applying faulty rules of judgement and stubbornly and stupidly maintaining their position even though they could not refute Job's arguments. Job's attention was more focussed on the ethical and religious undermining of the law for faithfulness among friends, and also on their speaking evil of the name of the Lord. Elihu's observation was sober and practical, though somewhat superficial. Elihu's judgement of Job also revealed little depth of insight. What he said was not untrue but it was incomplete. Alongside Job's cry for justice we also find his unconditional reliance on God. Elihu seems to have missed that.

Yet Elihu did an excellent job. He represented the orthodox reaction to Job's rather provocative confession of faith. The horizon of orthodoxy is not always wide; but God's Word spans the firmament.

⁶⁰ Cf. NASB and Douay/Confraternity-New Catholic Version

2. Tension and Courtesy (chapter 32)

Elihu was a very polite person but he lived with a lot of tension. His politeness was shown in his allowing the friends who were all older than he himself, to finish speaking completely. When Job had completed the last of his speeches, Elihu still waited a little longer in order to allow Eliphaz and his friends an opportunity to answer Job once more. We could learn something from him. Through his exemplary courtesy Elihu had, as it were, suppressed the tension that was building up within him. When the friends appeared to give no further response and even refrained from repeating their own harsh judgement, he allowed his own anger to spill over. Yet he was careful in consciously picking the moment to begin his indignant response and reveal his outrage. The behaviour of both the friends and of Job had frustrated him but as long as these older men were speaking he didn't give in to his anger.

Apparently Elihu came from an good home. Not only was he polite, he was also very mature in his faith. He had an element of the blamelessness of Job. Just as Job made a contract with his eyes, so Elihu made a contract with his mouth and with his feelings.

He was also an intelligent person. He knew that old people did not necessarily or automatically possess wisdom (it was always God who gave or withheld wisdom).

We may be sure that he had listened carefully to all their arguments. And he had noticed that not one of the friends had offered an appropriate response to the arguments presented by Job. He went on to tell them they should not think that, while they had great human wisdom, Job had refused to be swayed by their human words. Elihu claimed that, where they had failed he might succeed; God would lead Job to keep silent. And he explained his strategy,

“ But Job has not marshalled his words against me,
and I will not answer him with your arguments.” (vs 14)

Turning to Job, Elihu commented on the fact that the friends had been unable to answer his (vs 15). Therefore he now felt free to speak. Perhaps this was his way of asking Job's permission to enter the discussion (vs 16). Job may have indicated agreement with a nod or simply by looking at him with welcoming interest.

Then Elihu declared that, indeed, he could wait no longer. He experienced tremendous tension, “for I am full of words” (vs 18). He wanted to speak and get it off his chest. He was gasping for air!

He would show partiality to no-one, neither to Job nor to his friends. He would not try to

flatter anyone; that was not in his character. He knew that he could not fulfill his task through flattery. Elihu took his contribution seriously, as a task from his Maker who would remove him if he should use the falsehood of flattery (vs.22).

Elihu was a likeable and upright man, though not particularly gifted. His understanding of Job was limited. He served to remind Job of the best that was offered by orthodoxy of his days. What he told Job was not new to him but it brought him back into the circle of fellowship. And Job was thankful for that. Because of his great poverty and seclusion, Job had become very lonely, a loneliness deepened by the heartless attitude of the friends. Job's back was to the wall. Estranged from God, he carried his burdens bravely but he nevertheless experienced the isolation which accompanied it. He had nearly become a completely isolated loner. Elihu's speech turned him around, bringing Job back into the fold. He reproved Job for saying strange things which were not well understood. Elihu represented a sound orthodoxy. He started from the assumption of community and paid little attention to the destruction wreaked on that community by evil and folly. As an orthodox person he may well have been right to speak that way. He was a careful person. He called Job back to the narrow horizon of orthodoxy and in this he did Job a great service.

Thus we see that Elihu was a vital link in the proclamation of the Word through the book of Job. Job had seen the grandiose vistas of God's revelation to his people; Elihu, by pulling Job back into the community of God's people, prepared Job for the wonderful final dialogue with God. Except for Elihu, Job would not have been prepared to hear God's words spoken out of the thunder. He might not even have heard the thunder.

3. Affairs Among God's People (chapter 33)

The figure of Elihu has at times been grossly overrated or at other times unfairly ignored. Some have seen him as the one who brought the solution of the book of Job, a foolish position since Elihu was no that great a leader. Others have regarded him as a later addition, not really belonging in the book, but they have misinterpreted the wholesome influence on Job, and failed to recognize the consequent preparation for God's intervention.

Even though Elihu was not of great stature, he was a good person and faithful servant of the community to which the badly hurt Job belonged.

We may note the calm and friendly way he caught Job's attention. This was very necessary because Job did not know anymore where to look or turn. He kept Job's attention with the tenderness of a mother,

“But now, Job listen to my words;
pay attention to everything I say.” (vs 1)
“My words come from an upright heart;
my lips sincerely speak what I know.” (vs 3)

And he continued by empathizing with Job's position in having to listen to the poisonous darts from his friends. He, Elihu, would just make meaningful and clear statements. Both of them were ordinary people before God and Job should find nothing to fear in what Elihu might say. But Elihu had heard Job say certain things,

“I am pure and without sin;
I am clean and free from guilt.” (vs.9)

(Even though these words did not express Job's intent, he must have felt comforted by Elihu's brotherly love). Elihu continued in this vein,

“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.” (vss 10,11)

Elihu emphatically disagreed with Job and chided him for speaking thus in the fellowship of faith. Did Job consider himself so unique as to have mystical discussions with God? He encouraged him to return to the ordinary ways of the people and their offspring; that was where he belonged. Elihu reiterated his promise to keep his distance from the theology of Job's three

friends. He counselled Job not to argue with God for he was far greater than any human being. He had all the authority; He was sovereign. But then, Job knew all that.

If Job could not find God anymore then, surely, he must have strayed far from the safe environment of the community. How could *he* then have called God to account. That just wasn't done in the community; it was known that God wouldn't allow Himself to be called to account. And Job shouldn't think that God would not exonerate himself. Everyone knew that there was more than one way in which God spoke to His people. He revealed Himself in dreams, but only occasionally, once or twice in a lifetime at most. But then it was important to pay careful attention to these or the revelation might be missed altogether. Job's problem was that he didn't pay close enough attention! If he had only given undivided attention to the words of the Lord he would have heard him. Sometimes He would speak through the illness of a child: that could have been a revelation from God. Someone might have writhed in pain, lost weight and been unable to eat. He might even have come very close to death!

But then the redeemer would come, the mediator or an angel, one out of a thousand.

The expression 'one out of a thousand' appears to be an Old Testament expression for the Messiah.⁶¹ This very special 'One-out-of-a-thousand' was identified by Elihu as 'Mediator' and 'Angel', to show "unto man his uprightness" (KJV 33:23). This last phrase was also Messianic in nature, for a mediating angel would announce to the person who was suffering or near death, that he had been justified. God Himself would be,

“...gracious to him and say,
'Spare him from going down to the pit;
I have found a ransom for him.’” (vs 24)

In this we see that our “Orthodox Intermezzo” has presented us with a clear Messianic prophecy and this did not escape Job's notice. This was orthodoxy in good health; all the more noteworthy, because orthodoxy has seldom been successful in maintaining its health for long; it has nearly always been limited by its mediocre nature. Here, in the words of Elihu, we see orthodoxy at its best. Fully mature, it has been able to accomplish things that far exceeded its insight and strength.

After his Messianic prophecy, Elihu gave a description of the renewed and redeemed life. Verses 27 and 28 described the heart and core of true orthodoxy: misery, salvation and

⁶¹ See Judges 7:28

thanksgiving.⁶² This included the insight that only in thanksgiving could salvation be seen and only because of salvation have we been able to recognize our misery.

God offers salvation over and over again in surprising and wonderful ways. Elihu warned against the devastating notion that God's intervention might have been wearied or deficient. God has always had many resources in rescuing sinners. God always maintained his majesty but his mercy has been greater than could be imagined. This was superior orthodoxy that avoided giving a restrictive limited view of God's care and love.

Concerned as always, Elihu asked Job if he wished to answer, otherwise he would continue. Again, Job may have nodded his assent.

4. Elihu Confessed God's Righteousness (Chapter 34)

In the speech that followed, Elihu spoke of God's rightness in a way which was definitely an improvement on that of the three friends, but not by much. Elihu's reflection on God's righteousness was not free of cheap platitudes but it was much better than the twisted way in which the friends had construed God's judgement. Elihu placidly presented an upright orthodox confession. It was pretty bland and superficial but most people would be able to identify with it even today.

Those who read the book of Job with the eyes of Elihu's middle of the road position can find edifying wisdom but, at the same time, miss the real meaning and power of this book of the Bible. What moves us is that Job listened to protests of Elihu even when the latter accused Job of gross impiety. Elihu seemed nearly blind to the scope of God's universal command of love and thus failed to recognize the limitations of his orthodoxy. Yet he used kindly insistence to coach Job back into the fold of the community of faith. He drew him back from the outer limits of God's revealed reality. No human being, not even Job, could have held his own out on a limb for very long.

Elihu testified that,

“It is unthinkable that God would do wrong,
that the Almighty would pervert justice.” (vs 12)

⁶² Cf: the three major divisions of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Lord kept his distance from injustice and impiety. It did no harm to be reminded of that, although Job had not forgotten it when he had reached out to God for justice against God Himself. Job's vision had been so much sharper than that of Elihu. Nevertheless it was good medicine for Job to listen to the wholesome position of the younger man.

Elihu showed even a greater depth as he spoke about God's sovereignty. God had founded the entire world. He ruled and His rule encompassed His righteousness: how could one dare to call the Ruler of the entire world an incompetent sovereign? Would the Judge of the whole earth not do justice? Job should have seen Him the way the covenant community had seen Him throughout the ages and throughout the earth. He should have avoided locking himself into his lonely dispute with the Almighty but instead have granted Him His majesty. He judged both kings and nobles and never showed partiality: for he had created all of them (vs.19). He has always watched over us all with undivided attention and passed judgement accordingly.

Elihu's confession went even deeper: the Lord did whatever pleased Him.

“But if he remains silent, who can condemn him?

If he hides his face, [as he did to Job] who can see him?” (vs 29a)

That also constituted the fear of the Lord.

Yet even in this insightful confession there was a serious flaw. Elihu spoke out of the wisdom of his time and failed to see that Job had already progressed way beyond that wisdom. In the speech which followed this shortcoming would come home to roost.

5. Elihu's Teaching about God's Lack of Concern (chapter 35)

Very soon after his confession of the sovereignty of God, Elihu presented a very different doctrine. In chapter seven Job had said that he could not affect God in heaven above by committing a sin (7:20). There Job was still at the beginning of his journey of faith. In chapter 22 Eliphaz declared that human beings could not do God a favour (vs 2], and this was not altogether false. But both of these positions disregarded God's deep involvement in human affairs, an involvement so deep that while he here discussed Job's piety with Satan, He later allowed his own child to descend into the pit of human death. According to the orthodoxy of the day, Elihu declared that God was not involved in the daily lives of his people. This was the lowest point of Elihu's sermons,

“If you sin, how does that affect him?
If your sins are many what does that do to him?
If you are righteous, what do you give him,
or what does he receive from your hand?
Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself,
and your righteousness only the sons of man.” (35:6-8)

This was a strange gospel, this low point of Elihu's proclamation. Our Saviour gave us very different news, “...there is... rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents”⁶³, and also that the Father could not refuse anything that His children asked in Jesus' name.⁶⁴ The apostles warned us that even a relatively minor infraction grieved the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ The gospels are full of God's concern; and the book of Job no less reflects God's involvement through the prologue in Heaven as well as Job's cry for justice.

Elihu also made good points. In the second part of chapter 35 he actually contradicted what he had said earlier. He stated that indeed God did not always answer because people had actually called upon idol gods (someone else) for help. This was rather a dangerous argument. It could throw the one seeking God back on his own devices. But Elihu carried it off by referring to the birds of the air who also cried out to God, although that was not human prayer. Much crying to God remained at a level below that for human prayer. So Elihu concluded, rather

⁶³ Luke 15:7

⁶⁴ See John 14:13

hastily, that Job's call for help also had not passed the test.

Job could have said much to counter Elihu's speech, but he did not speak. He allowed Elihu to continue. Perhaps he realized that on a certain level, even beyond Elihu's own understanding, there was some truth in his words. Step by step Job was being prepared to meet God. He knew that he had been taken to the very edge of human understanding; Elihu called him back to a more normal, everyday human condition. So Job overlooked Elihu's short-sightedness.

6. Through Suffering God Rescued Those Who Suffered (Chapter 36)

The book of Job neared its completion with a wonderful series of discussions. At times it did not seem to progress very quickly, then it changed direction; at other times it turned back on itself almost to where it had started. Even the three friends could not completely maintain their positions. Job made conquest upon conquest and yet fell back to his lament. He declared God's salvation but missed the joy of that salvation. He found the peace that passed all understanding but did not hold on to it nor taste its goodness. Elihu showed him compassion and brought him back from the limits of God's reality. Elihu appeared to be captive to his own myopic orthodoxy and the limitations of his time. Job was not aware of his own gradual advancement in understanding God's Word revelation, and the orthodox believers of his time paid no attention to Job's discoveries even where these came very close to the wisdom of the New Testament.

Here we may see the work of the sages of the wisdom schools. They pitted one proverb over against another; one viewpoint invaded another. Such an approach protected them from the deadly dangers of the systematization of wisdom. The author of Elihu's speeches also served his own time well for without this contribution the book of Job would have been unintelligible for Old Testament readers. We too may profit from Elihu's orthodox contribution, however limited it may have been. He gave directives which help us to understand Job's lament, and he prepared Job to hear God speaking from the thunderstorm. Elihu may have had a narrow horizon but he contributed greatly to the intelligibility of the gospel in the book of Job.

After the depressing interlude of chapter 35, Elihu reached new heights with his fourth speech. He helped Job to become reconciled with his lot. This was not the final word, not even

⁶⁵See Ephesians 4:30

the final word of Elihu, but it was an essential part.

He began to look at the issue from a better perspective, and he liked what he saw. He possibly may have perceived that his earlier position had been inadequate. “God is mighty, but he does not despise men;” (vs 5a).

He watched over the righteous and the godless. He judged them and tested them. Again Elihu barely escaped giving superficially cheap words of advice. It has been exactly through suffering that God has rescued those who suffer (vs 15), and through persecution he opened their ears. Persecution itself never had the power to open hearts to the gospel, but God has used it as a means to that end; to incline people to hear the command of God’s love, and understand it.

Then Elihu spoke words of great kindness:

“He is wooing you from the jaws of distress
To a spacious place free from restrictions,
To the comfort of your table laden with choice food.” (vs 16)

The three friends had also alluded to Job’s return to prosperity, but always on the condition that he would have admitted that his committing a terrible sin was the cause of his suffering. Job, ofcourse, refused, for he would not barter for his safety. Elihu’s words here had a different sound. He seemed to say that through suffering God rescued those who suffered. Job’s suffering was indeed intense. He was “laden with the judgement due the wicked” [vs 17]. This could be dangerous, for Job might have been tempted to say, that the Lord saw his suffering yet did nothing to help. On the contrary, Elihu maintained, this affliction was getting him somewhere, although neither he nor Job knew of the destination.

In spite of such kindness Elihu still wore the blinders of his orthodoxy. Job must have noticed it but he also recognized the comfort and kindness accompanying this narrow viewpoint.

Elihu continued by praising the Lord as the great Teacher, highly exalted and above all rules and prescriptions, including the prescriptions given by His children, reminding Him of His promises. In this Elihu’s vision was expanding somewhat as he observed that no one could give God orders and no one could correct Him. Reflecting on that would bring one to the conclusion that the one wise thing to do would be to praise the One who made us.

So we hear Elihu’s song of praise as a continuous song which ended only when God began to speak. We may have difficulty understanding his words as a song of praise, but that may be because we tend to introduce distractions which only cloud the issue. We might say: God reveals himself in nature. While not untrue, it has become a lame piece of dogma. When Elihu spoke of the greatness of God, he presented the best of the orthodoxy of his day. All people, he

said, were witness to what God was doing, but they only looked upon it from a distance and didn't get closer because it was beyond them.

God is great, Elihu said, and beyond our understanding. This was the high point of Elihu's witness:

“How great is God - beyond our understanding!

The number of his years is past finding out.” (vs26)

From the distance Elihu saw the thunderstorm slowly approaching. Soon it would prove itself to be God's Thunder, God's intercepting in the course of events in Job's life. The young Elihu was deeply impressed. Looking into the distance he saw the threatening clouds accumulating, and he began to prophecy according to God's will.

It was not easy to speak with respect and insight about a thunderstorm. Few of us could do it. We are too close to the miracles of the Antichrist to understand the simple and yet profound speech of thunder. But Elihu could! He knew that animals could hear God's voice within the limits of their animal nature. He also knew that he was called to hear more than the animals by understanding God's voice in thunder in a human and religious sense.

In all this Elihu did not differentiate between the work of God in a thunderstorm and human lives. Even without himself knowing it, Elihu announced the justification of Job in announcing the justice of God. He who made the thunder clap also allowed destruction like a storm to pass over Job. Here again differentiating between the material world of the storm and the spiritual world of faith would be of little value.

7. The Upcoming Storm (Chapter 37)

While Elihu was speaking, God's thunderstorm was slowly but steadily approaching. Elihu sensed its revelational strength. He knew the meaning of God's words in the thunder. Many of us might learn something from him here. Today we have lightning rods, and know about discharges of static electricity. Our 'unbelieving' forefathers were more aware, because they listened to the thunder with an ear of awe and respect. However pagan, their belief also contained a remnant of respect for the numinous. Even today in some places the whole family gets up during a thunderstorm and gathers in the living room. Such actions might be motivated by superstition or fear, but it could also contain an element of worship of God, because all humans are complicated beings. Someone who says that thunder makes him laugh does not show much sensitivity for biblical wisdom.

When the thunder approached, Elihu said,

“At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place.

Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice,

to the rumbling that comes from his mouth.” (vs 1,2)

Here we might observe that the greatness in the thunder signified a kind of general revelation, which might have prepared someone to listen to God's word. Such a view might seem edifying, but is nevertheless misleading. Elihu heard the voice of God himself in the thunder. It was the voice of him who announced the command of his love: Law and Gospel all in one. Elijah rode up to heaven in a storm; and seven thunders responded to the angel in Revelation 10, when he announced that the judgment would no longer be postponed, calling with a loud voice as of a roaring lion. (cf. vs 4)

Elihu's depiction of thunder, rain, snow and ice was radically different from pagan worship of natural forces. Pagan worship included a fear that closely approached an animalistic form of dread. Yet such fear was better than human indifference or arrogance. In Elihu's words we clearly hear the awe and the fear of the Lord. We may be tempted to think that Elihu's reverence bordered on idolatry, but we would forget that as a form of religion, 'the fear of the Lord' has always opposed the two lies, the animalism of the heathen worship of the powers of nature, and secondly, human impiety which might lead to a deeper level of hatred for God than is even characteristic of the fallen angels. Indeed, someone who laughs at a thunderstorm is

dangerously close to the contempt of Antichrist.

Elihu invited Job to pay respectful attention to his simple reminder,

“Do you know how God controls the clouds
and makes his lightning flash?” (vs 15)

Perhaps Job failed to notice it altogether.

Understanding our world religiously requires a childlike naive knowledge. But our appreciation of scientific information can spoil our naive insights and childlike faith. This has happened too often among Christians as they put too much weight on any scientific knowledge as the basis for all other forms of knowing. When false reliance on scientific knowing fails, some are tempted to repudiate all science or even all knowledge, while others reject their faith. It is always possible to replace one set of errors with even worse mistakes and many people often seem to do just that.

Elihu pointed Job to see the miraculous deeds of the Creator and voiced the question a child might ask, ‘Could Job do what God did , making clouds in the sky?’(see vs15). His child-like faith, revealed a heart not corrupted by arrogance.

Elihu wanted to say that God was coming in the darkness of the gathering storm. He asked Job if he could tell them what to say to Him? (cf. vs 19). Without realizing it, Elihu was preparing Job for his talk with God.

“Tell us what we should say to him;
we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness.” (vs 19)

Elihu was talking about two kinds of darkness, the storm gloom that surrounded God’s appearance and the darkness of their own minds; although the two were actually the same. Mere human intelligence could not bring light into this kind of darkness. Human arrogance and hatred of God might be called forms of darkness around God’s throne and appearance. Children of God have always encountered darkness in their own hearts; in the words of fellow Christians, as well as in the everyday activities and thoughts of the enemies of the Lord. Typical for believers of their time Job and Elihu had a veiled awareness of faith, that in this complex threatening darkness the light of the Redeemer would begin to shine through. For us today that is no more a vague suspicion but mature certainty. Indeed for us light has appeared into the darkness even though some of the darkness will remain until the last day. The time between Christ’s resurrection and return in glory is a time full of light, yet also a time of greater atrocities than were seen in antiquity. The hatred of God’s enemies, the falling away of His children and even the sins of those to be saved seem immeasurably worse today.

As the thunder approached, Elihu accompanied it with his proclamation. At times there was darkness, he proclaimed, and then the wind cleared the sky. A golden splendour was shining from the North; God was clothed with majesty.

Then in vss 23 and 24 Elihu, the man limited by his orthodoxy, reappeared:

“The Almighty - we cannot find him;
he is great in power and justice,
and abundant righteousness he will not violate.
Therefore mortals fear Him;
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.” (NRSV)

Elihu was a faithful witness to the greatness of God and His omnipotence. But, unlike Job, he was unable to go beyond the boundaries of his limited horizon. We may have some appreciation of Job’s halting feet as he began that journey beyond his horizon. Elihu’s judgement on Job as ‘wise in his own conceit’ was nonsense. Here the restrictions of his own orthodoxy revealed themselves. We must not lose sight of this even as we admire the manner in which Elihu prophesized during the thunder storm: Elihu did not get beyond the narrow confines of his knowledge of God, though he admitted that mortals could never fathom the greatness of God.

V. Job's Talk With God

1. The Appearance of the Lord (Chapter 38)

God Himself began to speak to Job from the thunder which was approaching during Elihu's last speech. That was exactly how it happened and if we are to understand the closing chapters of the book of Job in its grandness and comfort, we must let go of all theories about style, form, artistic merit or targeted audience. It has been highly fashionable to let faddish literary theories dominate the interpretation of Scripture. It is only a modern way of building a wall between God and the human heart. When this method begins to influence the church of Jesus Christ it brings corruption and breakdown and prepares the way for a 'power grab' by the Antichrist.

Elihu was right in announcing the coming of Almighty God. We might offer our opinion regarding the infrequency and/or necessity of the appearances of God, and we might conclude that the Lord did appear in a storm at that time and in those circumstances, but would not do so today. By saying that, we would be forgetting that Job, too, experienced a time of a world-wide calamity, for people were forgetting God's Word and Covenant. The dimensions of this problem have become only too obvious in the short-sighted arguments offered by the three friends. But then again, we must not forget the apostle Peter's teaching that the word of prophecy was more certain than any experience, even the experience of those who saw the transfiguration on the mountain.⁶⁶

Therefore we need not be jealous of Job, the three friends and Elihu for the experience they had, however impressive and memorable it was for them, right up to the day they died.

Job mourned the days of his lost happiness 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.” (29: 2b-4)

⁶⁶ See 2 Peter 1:19

That was Job's reality, and we must keep his memory of God's intimate friendship clearly in mind if we are to understand what follows.

Now Job saw the Lord; He spoke to him from the storm. It is wrong to think here of a kind of word proclamation that the storm somehow elicited in Job's mind. Such exegesis weakens the text; it is not based on, but imposed on the text. Job, his friends and Elihu heard the Lord speak these words.

At the same time God's words to Job put him back on his feet. It had been Job's task to reach beyond the outer boundaries of the knowledge of God and to give testimony which approximated the New Testament in revelation. Job completed that task in weakness. Nonetheless he fulfilled it so well that the Lord himself would later say that Job had spoken well of him.

Job completed his task blamelessly, though in weakness. This juxtaposition appears to point to an irreconcilable contradiction but we must leave it that way. Even by suggesting that we must separate the "person" from the "office of prophet" he fulfilled, we will not clear up the contradiction, because a "person" and his "office" are too closely interrelated.

2. The Lord Sought out His Servant (Chapter 38)

So the Lord directed his word to his servant Job, the blameless one, upright, peerless and fleeing all evil; yet his initial words seemed ironic and might have made one think of God's calling out to Adam.

"Who is this that darkens my council
with words without knowledge?" (vs 1)

Yet Adam had forsaken his office, while Job had not. There is a big difference between the "Where are you?" of Genesis 3:9 and "Who is this..." here. Elihu and the three friends heard these words. Perhaps they initially enjoyed it secretly, assuming that Job would be proven wrong. If so they would be disappointed, for Job was to be justified.

There are two things we notice immediately in the speech of God to Job. First, the Lord did not directly address any of Job's concerns. No matter how we describe this speech, the Lord did not answer the questions Job raised. But God did accept Job's challenge. Secondly, it becomes increasingly clear, that the Lord picked up on the speech of Elihu regarding the

thunderstorm.

“Brace yourself like a man;
and I will question you,
and you shall answer me.” (vs 3)

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?” (vs 4a)

Even Zophar in his first speech had asked, “Can you fathom the mysteries of God?” (11:7). The question there was part of a speech which had been unacceptable, yet Zophar’s comment had anticipated something of God’s own question. Zophar had not made good use of the question for he became angry and did not even participate in the third round of speeches.

Job himself had also made a similar statement in chapter 26 as he reached a pinnacle of insight (vs 14). Elihu too praised God as a teacher who received instruction from no one. God himself picked up on this thought. He did not say anything that Job did not already know. We may compare this with the sacraments of the Christian Church. In the sacraments nothing new is taught that is not already known from the Word. But God’s promises can be seen, tasted and experienced in the sacraments. In the same way God verbalized to Job the very words which Job knew already from the oral and written traditions of his day.

Where you there when I began my work of creation. If so, why don’t you tell me about it? The Lord refers to the very wisdom about which Job had spoken so beautifully in chapters 26 and 28, indicating that God’s wisdom built the earth. Such wisdom is not based on human knowledge but is far more precious than any product of human intelligence. It cannot be found in the depth of the sea, and even the realm of the dead had only heard a faint rumor of its existence. Even in this the Lord tells Job nothing new. Job himself had confessed wisdom to be of divine origin, for those who desire human wisdom must repeat in their own words what God himself has prompted them to say.

Then the Lord spoke about his handiwork in creation. Job 38 gives an account which is similar to that of the wisdom schools in Israel. Proverbs too speaks of God’s wisdom and his work as an architect.⁶⁷ God’s building plans were truly original and his laws for creation set parameters for what he has made.

“Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!” (vs 5). These last words have often been seen as divine irony, but there was more to it. Job was well aware of God’s creative works, his sovereignty and originality in all he created. He had himself witnessed to that, and had not

forgotten it. Yet this knowledge had not given him peace in his heart. He confessed God's sovereignty without experiencing the boundless joy that must accompany the confession that the Lord did all that pleased him. Perhaps he was too much wrapped up in his present misery to enjoy the grandeur of God's creation as a spiritual feast. We could cheapen our discussion by saying that Job had become egocentric through his terrible sickness and poverty. We all know that certain people who are very ill or old can become so self-centered that they are impossible to live with. But Job's situation was not that simple. He was struggling for his right. A right guaranteed by the Lord. Even with the greatest boldness of faith he still trusted the Lord. His confession of innocence should not be confused with a belief in his own sinlessness and self-righteousness.

It is remarkable that when the Lord visited his servant Job, he did not talk about any of these things. He did not mention how Job's faith had been stretched. It sounded more as if the Lord wanted to turn Job's attention away from himself and his problems. Here the reader must remember the words the Lord spoke to Satan about "...my servant Job. There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." Soon we will find that Job had fulfilled his task so well that he would become the advocate and priest on behalf of his three friends, who had angered the Lord with their false theologies.

The Lord led Job's thoughts back to the time when the earth was being prepared for human habitation. There were witnesses to this work of creation. The angels are mentioned as those who, shining like stars, sang heavenly anthems while observing the construct of the great Architect (vs 7). That creation work involved setting limits: measuring lines were stretched, footings were set, and cornerstones were laid (vs 5-7). Even the sea, the most unrestrained of all the elements was behind closed doors. At the Lord's bidding it could go so far and no further, "here is where your proud waves halt..." (vs 11b).

"Have you [as chief commander] ever given orders to the morning,
or shown the dawn its place," (vs 12a).

Check out your own experience. The Lord described the coming of the dawn as if a huge hand picked up the earth and shook it to rid the world of the evil doers who took advantage of the cover of darkness. Lurking evildoers were put to shame, because the sun exposed their distasteful endeavours.

"Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea

⁶⁷ See Proverbs 8: 22-31.

or walked in the recesses of the deep?”(vs 16)

The Lord continued to challenge Job and his company with His questions. Had they ever explored the realm of the dead? Did their comprehension reach to the outer edges of the world, or was it limited to the boundaries of their immediate surroundings? Light and darkness have always had their own appointed place; all things were properly regulated within the whole creation. Had they ever taken inventory of all the laws set for nature? Was their understanding so thorough that they could have given an authoritative evaluation of God’s handiwork?

“Surely you know, for you were already born!

You have lived so many years!” (vs 21)

There was more than just irony here. People who have gained human wisdom by speaking only at divine prompting would indeed have attained to the very source of religious knowledge. Ultimately, their knowledge of reality, and of the createdness of all things, went back to what the Lord had revealed to Adam. So again we might ask whether Job had forgotten what he had learned by faith; or had he gotten so stuck in his own questioning that his faith no longer supported him.

Then God spoke of the powers of nature which could arouse so much fear among the pagans that they tried to control them by means of witchcraft and magic. The Lord appealed to Job’s knowledge of faith. Didn’t he know that the Lord ruled and that those within his covenant were completely safe? The modern reader may agree that the desire to control the powers of nature was also a major drive towards the development of modern sciences; nonetheless, God Himself does not reject such sciences but wants them to serve Him as instruments of His righteousness.

God spoke of the armories where he stored snow and hail, storms of rain and frost. In the same vein He continued speaking about His control over the stars and the clouds, reminding us that His power vastly exceeded that of the soothsayers or ancient and modern rainmakers. Clouds were portrayed as responding to God’s wisdom; they even appeared to possess wisdom themselves. All the time God addressed Job as an ally who was averse to using magic to control nature. And in this way He turned Job’s attention to His faithfulness without mentioning directly His covenant of faith or the troubles Job had just experienced due to his claim to that covenant and its promises.

3. The Life of the Animals (Chapter 39)

In chapter 35:11 Elihu had said that God had given people more understanding than the animals. Those who neglected the covenant were brought to a panic which caused them to live close to the level of animals. In addition, after the Fall animals became a threat to human beings.

In chapter 38:39 to the end and throughout chapter 39 the Lord Himself spoke about the life of the animals. On the one hand He continued to speak about all the creatures whom he ruled in His wisdom and who, as Job was gently reminded, were all fellow creatures with Job himself. On the other hand, God revealed Himself as a unique and creative artisan who created all the animals for His good pleasure and who took delight in the works of His hands.

The animals, creatures like Job and his friends, had been given a variety of strengths which were lacking in humans who generally could not assist animals in their own struggles. Some animals have been drawn into the human domain and have become subject to human domination, but many could never be domesticated. How would we as human beings take up with a lion or its cubs? They have always gone their own way. Human dominion over the animal world has been greatly reduced since the Fall. Even the raven,

“...when its young cry out to God
and wander about for lack of food...” (38:41b).

(their cry is never a prayer!) have never relied on human help or intervention. How could a rancher exert influence over a mountain goat? She lived her own life and thereby revealed the magnitude of her Maker over against the punity of humans who could not keep her in a stable. She had never needed help from people, not even to give birth to her young who, in turn, soon grew up to be independent even from their mother.

The wild donkey lived in complete freedom; the zebra too could not be tamed. God Himself has always directed these animals to their place. Civilizations have not contained them; they have gone their own way.

They might have tried to reduce a bison to become a pet and servant but they would not have been successful. The bison has been God’s handiwork and humans have had to accept that. It could not be domesticated and wouldn’t pull a plow. Job learned here that those who could not make a wild animal render obedience should not be so arrogant as to think they could figure out God’s blueprints for creation.

In this way the Lord reminded Job of His sovereignty. There was much to impress Job in

the life of the animals, God's creatures. Even so it pleased God to withhold wisdom from some of them (cf. 39:17). Animals have never gone beyond the boundaries of their created instincts. While many animals have revealed a native instinct, seemingly allowing them to calculate and plan in advance, others have been shown to be downright senseless and self-destructive in their behaviour. The Lord pointed to the ostrich as a creature that foolishly laid her eggs in the sand and treated her young harshly.

“Yet when she spreads her feathers to run,
she laughs at horse and rider.” (vs. 18)

The example that followed concerned an animal that did respond to training and human instruction: the cavalry horse. But this animal too, though often intimate with humans, always remained somewhat of an enigma. By cleverly noting and using the ways in which a horse has allowed itself to be led, people have gone a long way towards controlling it. Yet control has never been the same as understanding. In all animal life there has always been unfathomable mystery. A horse trained for battle had power and something majestic and humans did exercise control over it.

However they had to work with what was given; they could not even influence its growth and splendour; its strength and fierceness. Though trained to obedience, the horse nonetheless retained an impenetrable freedom of spirit.

Birds of prey were given this same kind of freedom. The owl and the vulture have always lived their own lives. Human beings have been unable to change them: they have lived the life which God had outlined for them, a life which has remained a mystery for humans.

4. Job's First Answer (Chapter 40:4,5)

The Lord had reminded Job of His hidden designs. His creation was unfathomable and secret. He had set limits and boundaries that could not be broken. He ruled over storms and lightning. In the same way he kept His secrets regarding the world of animals: their intractability to human intervention, their imperviousness to human help or guidance; and their stupidity and freedom. Thus as God had kept from people all kinds of secrets in the creation of the animals, why would he not have had similar secrets in his dealings with humans? Did keeping covenant with mankind mean that God revealed everything? After all, was He not the God that did all that pleased Him?

Job had understood that he was addressed as an ally. He also learned that he had to be satisfied with the Lord's answer to him. Job understood that the Lord kept secrets which He would never reveal. Had he also understood that this answer, although it completely ignored his burning questions and the wonderful advances of faith made by him, was in fact *the* answer?

Job understood that human wisdom, although of divine origin, remained human wisdom. He understood that God remained sovereign even in religious relationships where He placed mankind next to Himself.

Job's response took him a small step forwards. He recognized how small he was before the Lord (see 40:4 NRSV); with the wisdom which he had first received from God, he had challenged God!⁶⁸ It is perplexing that he had fulfilled his task exactly because he had dared to speak against the Lord and had even persisted in doing so. But now he would desist,

“I put my hand over my mouth” (40:4b)

Job had not found the solution which he, without even knowing it, possessed all along; the solution which contained both the justification of God *and* the justification of Job (in spite of his complaints and cries for justice).

Did he call out in vain?

⁶⁸ In Dutch: talked back to God *or* talked against God *or simply* talked to God

5. The Lord Continued His Talk with Job (Chapter 40)

Job had said, “I put my hand over my mouth”, but the Lord was *not* satisfied with that! There were many issues separating Job and the Lord: his blamelessness, his cry for justice, his trust in the Lord and, on the other side, the things God had created. In all of this we might ask ourselves whether Job had clearly differentiated between what was God’s affair and what his own, and whether he had understood where they had common cause. That left the complaints of Job. He would complain no more after this; he had put his hand to his mouth. It remained to be seen what the Lord wanted of him.

God had spoken of the secrets kept from Job, for He did what pleased him and that Job continued to be a covenanted servant. Such a status involved great dignity, for the law called those to whom the word of the Lord had come, “gods”.⁶⁹ The covenant has always allowed for intimate friendship with God, even through a prayer as short as an extended breath. Job had spoken of the days of his happiness when his home knew God’s intimate friendship (29:3). He had also spoken of his inability to find God’s dwelling place (23:3). He had claimed that God had denied him justice,

“The Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul” (27:2)

But Job had also said that his Witness was in heaven; his Advocate was on High; he knew that his Redeemer lived; he would see God even without his flesh; and his heart yearned within him. Job had declared the greatness of God as well as his omnipotence (Ch.26). He had praised the pricelessness of wisdom and its divine origin.

And Job had listened to the words of the young Elihu. He never once interrupted him.

Finally, he was given the opportunity to talk with God. It was nothing less than a miracle. When God spoke he did not necessarily say new things to His listeners. It was always a miracle that He spoke to humans at all. In the speech with Job the Lord had spoken of his secrets and creative workmanship. And Job replied, “ I put my hand on my mouth”. He would say no more because he was too insignificant.

Job did not pity himself nor did he need to do so. By this time he had gotten his way: a discussion with God Himself. Yet this session revealed a struggle, not unlike the struggle of Jacob.⁷⁰ In this instance too, Job refused to let go and we become aware of how much God may

⁶⁹ See Exodus 21:6; Ps. 82:1

⁷⁰ See Genesis 32

become involved in the lives of human beings, including their conquests of faith. There is always joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.⁷¹ And the very One who rejoices in Heaven may struggle along with His child on Earth as if He Himself were human.

The Lord may even have rejoiced at the audacity of faith found in the complaints of Job. We could not possibly know but we might guess at it. Even more wonderful was the Lord allowing Himself to be pushed around by Job. For in the second speech where the Lord opened with the same words as the first, we may notice a disturbing emphasis,

“Brace yourself like a man;

I will question you, and you will answer me” (vs 7).

It comes across to us like the reiteration of a command, revealing the Lord’s pain at Job’s initial disobedience. The Lord seemed to say, ‘Didn’t you hear me Job? Do I really have to repeat myself?’

A life in covenant union with the Lord has many facets. God is highly exalted and his years are countless but He seems to have a hard time saying ‘No’ to His children, even when they begin to get annoying. He rates very highly those who place His honour above all, even above their own salvation. The Lord is very sensitive to those who remind Him of their baptism as proof of His involvement in their lives. When human beings hold up God’s word and stutter, “But you promised it, Lord!” that moves Him and touches Him. We might almost say that He cannot take that very well. And so we realize how foolish it is to attempt to “catalogue” God’s “attributes”.

In God’s second talk with Job we notice clearly that He was moved, remaining the exalted one yet coming very nearby. If we expect that the Lord would have given the same advice as the three friends, we would be quite mistaken. That would soon become clear from His approval of Job’s rejection of his friends’ theology and his own declaration.

“Would you discredit my justice?

Would you condemn me, to justify yourself?” (vs 8)

It may even have sounded a little like Bildad in his first speech,

“Does God pervert justice?

Does the Almighty pervert what is right?” (8:3)

Even Zophar in his first speech had asked,

“Can you fathom the mysteries of God?” (11:7)

And Bildad in his third speech had asked,

⁷¹ Luke 15:7

“How then can a man be righteous before God?” (25:4)

Yet these words spoken by the friends on behalf of God were condemned. Eventually they were going to need Job’s prayers on their behalf.

This we must keep in mind when we read God’s second talk with Job. Even Elihu had said that the almighty did not pervert justice; (34:12) he too had called Job a man of empty talk (35:16) and conceited (37:25 RSV). As the Lord pursued His talk with Job He revealed His concern and surprising alarm.

In 2 Cor. 5:20 we read, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making an appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.” We may hear something of this persistent questioning, this urgent pleading in the words of Job 40:9,

“Do you have an arm like God’s
and can your voice thunder like his?”

Elihu who prophesied of God’s thunder said,

“Listen, listen to the roar of his voice,
to the rumbling that comes from his mouth.” (37:2)

Someone with little respect for the Scriptures once commented that the fortieth chapter of Job sounded childish and boastful! This disrespectful comment does contain an element of truth. The book of Job is quite a childlike book; whoever does not repent and become like a child will not understand this book, even though he may write an entire theological commentary on it or produce a thick learned work full of historical and literary insight. Reading Job truly may be called ‘child’s play’. And what about God’s boasting? God has always been so intimately involved in the lives of his people that he reminds them of His power, His creativity and the thunder of his voice. Did Job not say, “How faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?”(26:14b). Parents may at times use a boastful voice with their children, reminding them that parental love always hopes, always believes and always perseveres.⁷² And we may well question a modern pedagogy which only condemns such parental boasting.

With all humility, we may accept this statement: Chapters 40 and 41 of the book of Job revealed the disturbing and concerned boasting of God.

⁷² Compare 1 Cor. 13:7

6. The Lord Spoke of Great Animals (chapters 40 and 41)

Even in his second answer to Job, the Lord did not talk about Job's complaints and cries for justice. Nor did He address Job's discoveries of faith. The Lord spoke about great animals.

The description of the first animal, the *behemoth*, seemed to indicate the preservation of a faint memory of a gigantic prehistoric animal. The power and grandeur of this animal corresponded to the power with which God urged Job to clothe himself. In verses 7-14 of chapter 40 the Lord challenged Job to show his great power.

...clothe yourself with honour and majesty.
Unleash the fury of your wrath,...
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 (vss 10-14).

There has always been a completely impenetrable secret in the relationship of God's children with their heavenly Father. He continuously admonishes them to repent and turn to Him; yet when they obey, it becomes clear that it is His doing from beginning to end. He speaks His divine Word and maintains full authority over its meaning and intelligibility while at the same time entrusting that Word to the church and *her* exegesis. And here, Job had fulfilled his difficult task and the guilt of Satan was greatly multiplied because it had been proven to be true about Job that, "There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (1:8b)

Nonetheless, the Lord challenged that very servant on whether perhaps the Lord had not done a good job of it and whether Job himself was clever enough to improve on it.

And so the Lord described the behemoth. This animal was already extinct but its past existence was known in Job's days. That impressive and great monster was one of God's creatures, just like Job. It had eaten grass like an ox, yet the strength of its legs and belly had been awesome. When it flexed its tail it had looked like a cedar. His bones had resembled tubes

of bronze and his limbs, rods of iron. He had truly been one of God's masterpieces and had been armed to the teeth. Slowly it wandered up the mountains in search of food; the smaller wild animals, whose species would survive him played nearby. When they saw the behemoth they began to hop around. This dreadful beast went to sleep in the shade. It was not alarmed at the raging river but just waded through it at leisure. That animal was Mr. Untouchable himself. And God had made him.

The Lord also mentioned talks about *Leviathan*, likely another prehistoric animal whose existence was also known. It had found a place in the myths indicating that an idolatrous worship around him had (or still) existed. Job recognized the difference between the service of God and idolatrous worship. And again Job's knowledge of his covenant relationship with God may be presupposed.

The portrayal of the extinct Leviathan was detailed. Human beings could not catch or imprison him. Neither could they train or domesticate him; it was totally beyond human control. They could not offer him for sale nor force him against his will. Their weapons made no dent in him. No one who tried to put a hand on his head would ever do so again. The Lord made this animal simply because He took pleasure in doing so. All this should have given Job a good idea of who the Lord was.

Job himself could have learned from Leviathan even though it was only an animal. God had given that monster his frightening power. Job could learn from that too.

The portrayal of the Leviathan certainly exceeded the normal characteristic of an animal. The Lord used hyperbolic exaggeration to reflect the fear which this creature would have evoked among the godless.

His breath sets coals ablaze,
and flames dart from his mouth.
Strength resides in his neck;
dismay goes before him (41:21,22).

Weapons could not touch him and he trampled iron like straw.

At the end of this description we notice a word which reminds us of the beginning of the book: "Nothing on earth is his equal" (vs 33a) The reader may remember that the Lord Himself had twice applied similar words to his servant Job (1:8; 2:3).

Leviathan was a creature of God, just like Job. Leviathan was unrivalled, just like Job.

God had paid close attention to his servant Job; he asked Satan if he had paid attention to His servant Job. Now it's Job's turn to pay attention to God.

7. Job's Conversion (Chapter 42)

“Then Job replied to the Lord:

‘I know that you can do all things;

no plan of yours can be thwarted” (vs 1,2). Job confessed and praised God's

sovereignty. That was his conversion.

We don't really know what the word *conversion* means. When we think we know it, we realize that the real meaning is always bigger and wider, deeper and more wonderful than we could have guessed.

Of course Job had always been a converted person. In the days of his prosperity, God's intimate friendship blessed his house. And yet Job was in need of repentance.

When the Christian community (such as the church) is alive in faith with the promise of growth, it knows how to talk about conversion; sudden conversions from deadly sins, accompanied with great emotional shock; or quiet everyday conversions. As soon as that community thinks it has a handle on what constitutes *conversion*, it is astonished by reports from mission fields of very different experiences of conversions far away from the familiar home front. They may hear about evil spirits being cast out; incredible powers of healing and miracles are often witnessed. The sound of revival has always come from the most unexpected corners. Worldly people with but little knowledge of faith may openly confess their love for the Saviour while those who have walked quietly with the Lord all their lives hear of amazing testimonies of faith.

Job explained what happened to him, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5).

For sixty or seventy years he had feared God. That was not to be despised. He had had a rich and deep understanding of God which continued to be meaningful. But now there was a difference, just as when someone who had heard about another person for years, finally met this person in the flesh. The difference was, in fact so big that hearsay knowledge seemed to mean very little in comparison. Yet at this point we should remind the reader of the sacramental

meaning of God's talk with Job. As human beings we are primarily *listening* and therefore *obedient* (or when not listening, disobedient) creatures. In the sacrament we can see, touch and taste that which we know already from hearing the Word preached. Faith has always come through hearing. So also, when God spoke to Job, he listened, in a special sacramental way. He heard nothing new but his faith was strengthened immeasurably.

For Job that was not negligible! Job had a substantial knowledge of faith. He had spoken out of that faith and, through the process of his lamenting, he had increased in that knowledge of faith to an extent that must have pleased and encouraged the Lord. When the knowledge of faith was reduced to theologizing, faith became small, weak and even comatose and it would have been impossible to say, "My ear had heard of you." This was the way of the three friends. Job's faith had been weakened when he had focussed more on himself than on God; but he was dissatisfied with that and constantly made miraculous recoveries. That was why, in his second answer to God, he was able to say, "Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand" (42:3). He had confessed the Name of the Lord but did not understand what he was doing; and so he missed the joy of salvation.

This was Job's conversion: that he turned his attention away from himself and, instead, focussed his whole spiritual attention on the Lord. Therefore he was able to say, "I despise myself", which meant that he recognized that he had to turn around and then did turn around.⁷³ Some translations use, "I retract all I have said," (vs 6 JB) but this tends to destroy a proper understanding of the book of Job. What, after all, did Job have to retract? Certainly not his testimonies such as "I know that my Redeemer lives" (9:25) nor "In my flesh I will see God" (19:26). But faithful believers throughout the ages have never read Job that way! When Job said, "That is why I despise myself" (vs 6a), he did not mean that he called down God's judgement on himself. That would have been a terrible sin. But Job *did* apply the Word of God, as it was known to him, to himself. He did this by paying attention to God, by listening to His Word. We can learn this from Job, that, like him, we must learn over and over again that only God is God.

⁷³ See NIV Study Bible notes, also for 9:21.

8. Job's Later Life (42:7-17)

At the time of his conversion Job had not known that his deadly illness would be healed. His task had not yet been finished. Job had yet to offer prayers and prepare sacrifices on behalf of his three friends who had abandoned the “fear of the Lord” (6:14) and had broken God’s law for friendship. Job knew very well that God’s people were to hate the enemies of the Lord. He had also threatened his friends with judgement (19:29) and time and again, renewed his appeal for their friendship. And the Lord instructed him to make a sacrifice and pray for his enemies. Even when he did not know that he would be healed from an illness as serious as the last stages of leprosy, Job, with a Christ-like spirit, persevered in what he had learned through long obedience (31:29,30) to submit to God’s request.

As in Job’s testimonies, we are surprised to see how much all this foreshadowed the New Testament. Job *did* comply and God had waited for that response. Yet Job knew the dangers posed by the likes of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, especially in a period of world-wide secularization. They attempted to destroy the work of healthy orthodoxy.

Then the Lord brought about a change in Job’s life, because he had prayed for his faithless friends with their false theologizing.

Once Job has been healed he went back to his own home. He was able to leave the land of desolation. The three friends disappeared without one more word. They had shared in the blessing of Job and as a result of Job’s intervention, the Lord did not punish them in accordance with their folly.

All the members of his family finally showed up, “They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him, and each gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring” (42:11b).

The Lord proceeded to double his former possessions; eventually he would have ten more children, for a total of twenty, as the ones who had died would see God *without their flesh*. It seemed as if the Lord was repaying him double for what He had robbed from him.

“Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job’s daughters and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers” (42:15).

Job was a very unusual man.

It has been said that Job’s wife was never mentioned again. But was her presence not indicated by the fact that she bore him ten more children?

After this Job continued to live as in the former days of his prosperity. He returned to a 'normal' life after completing his difficult task. He had completed it himself; and the God of heaven helped him to succeed because Christ participated in Job's struggle. Job could go back to his life again: God's intimate friendship blessed his house; God's lamp shone over him; he returned to the gate of the city and took his seat in the public square; he rescued the poor who cried for help; he made the widow's heart sing; and took the case of the stranger and those who could not afford and advocate (chapter 29). It was all back to normal and he was still blameless as before. In his time there was no one on earth like him, blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil.

And finally he died, old and full of years. And, fully satisfied, he departed from the banquet of life which had been prepared for him by the King of kings.

VI. The Message of the Book of Job

Review

To conclude our reflection in this study of the book of Job, it is useful to review what has been accomplished through our attempt to understand this rich and inexhaustible book. To do so we will divide the material into several sections as we review the characters who have contributed to the message of this book. In so doing I will assume acceptance of the unity of this book as an expression of its divine authority. There are but two options here, either we accept such a unity or we deny it. Both involve a choice based on faith. Anyone who pretends to take a neutral position is mistaken and only closes the road to understanding this part of God's revelation.

Inevitably, we begin by thinking about Job himself and then about his friends. But we cannot start with them. The book itself begins with the character of Satan, not, of course, as a figure who appears in the first verse of the book but as the character who instigated the suffering of Job as a means of advancing his own diabolical ends. One could make a contrary argument, that the Lord God Himself addressed Satan first and that Satan can do nothing without God's permission (although this is not the same as what God allows). But the authors of the book of Job were undoubtedly united in portraying the Lord God as exalted above his law and his creation; so it would be inappropriate to rank him among the participants in the drama. God's sublime position, far above the creation, is indeed one of the most important aspects of the message of the book of Job. Therefore those who compare the beginning of the book of Job with Goethe's Faust will notice a big difference: in Faust's 'Prologue in Heaven' God appears as but one of the participating characters (indeed, this typifies this work of art as one of apostasy). No doubt, the 'Prologue in Heaven' was indirectly inspired by Job 1 and 3, but reading the book of Job in the Goethian spirit would make it completely unintelligible.

On the contrary, the figure of Satan is a creature driven by his own spirit of evil. Goethe's Mephistopheles, on the other hand, is a self-conscious, independent figure, more pious and worthy than God Himself. In this it is not hard to detect the religious predisposition of the author. Job 1 and 2 deal with reality, portraying the evil one as a creature, though great and powerful, to whom God, for reasons known only to Himself, has permitted free reign within certain boundaries. Thus Satan is described as a character on a leash, who participated in a

human drama and even tried to influence the outcome. Yet he had no power beyond what was assigned and could not step outside his given role. His role may appear to have given him unlimited opportunity and he seems to have been the one to set in motion the bitter tragedy that occupies most of the book. Yet, in the end he is gone and does not reappear on the stage. He continues to rage today but Job's vision of a Redeemer shows us how little real influence Satan can ultimately exert in the life of God's people.

When, at the end of the drama, God Himself answered Job from the storm, He referred to the 'sons of God' (38:7) who were also mentioned in 1:6 and 2:1, but Satan received no more mention. As soon as God Himself entered the stage of human justice, (a world from which He is never absent) where He continues to work righteousness according to His good pleasure, Satan quickly absents himself from the drama. He may continue to exercise his influence but in the larger drama with its ultimately happy ending, he has spoiled his chances for a significant role.

After a brief discussion of the role of Satan we do well to devote some reflection on each of the three friends and to Elihu. A review of these four will help clarify our view of Job, who continues to be a mysterious person. But the essential message of the book only becomes clear when we meditate on the subject that God Himself introduced: the animals.

We will discuss in sequence: 1. Satan; 2. Eliphaz; 3. Bildad; 4. Zophar; 5. Elihu; 6. Job; and 7. The animals.

1. Satan

The dark figure of Satan overshadows almost the whole book of Job. His role was brief but we constantly notice his meddling in the discussions and in the devastating impact on the life of Job.

A strange suggestive aura floated about the figure of the evil one, suggesting what he himself hoped against all odds, that his chances against God's throne had not yet been lost. With these suggestions he attempted to convince both himself and his cohorts of fallen angels, as well as all mankind. He revealed himself as the father of lies, for he insinuated that from behind the stage he was able to control the drama of human history. The life of Job was only a small part in that control but it was an indispensable and important part of it. As we watch carefully we note that the book of Job includes the demise of Satan. His defeat was certain for we see that he could not now maintain himself as one of the players in human history. We may see this as a prophecy, for the actual defeat would occur much later, when Christ's work was completed. But that was not all of it. By his shrewd and cruel meddling in the life of Job, Satan managed to dig his own grave. In the story of Job the evil one lost the game. Job's righteousness proved too strong for him. Even a deathly ill man appeared as witness to God's revealed truth concerning the unity of Law and Gospel. Thus Satan's plot turned out as a horrible mistake for himself. Instead of success he suffered a devastating blow. We may be quite correct in ascribing paranormal power to Satan for he can see into human hearts and do so better than many an experienced psychoanalyst. But repeatedly he made mistakes concerning the faithful, for he has never known and could never know the source of their confidence. Simple truths of the Scripture appear ridiculous to him. He is aware of his own power and penetrating intelligence and also discerns human weakness and misery better than we do ourselves. But he does not know the meaning of the word 'Grace'. He may meddle in the lives of people and nations and in the wisdom of gifted unbelievers. But the simplicity of the Gospel of the Kingdom is totally beyond his understanding.

The history of Job is also the history of the defeat of Satan, and a painful one at that! This defeat constitutes a loss that he can never regain. With it, the evil one has taken a giant step towards his ultimate exclusion. He may not fully understand it but he surely senses its impact. Immediately after the Fall into sin, God publicly declared war on Satan: "...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;"⁷⁴

In his enmity against the man Job, Satan indicated that he recognized and acknowledged

Job as an enemy, namely, as being a descendant of the woman. As a believer, Job is counted among those who belong to Jesus. Even though that notion was still unclear in those days, especially for Satan who has always held a faulty notion about God's strategy, Satan nonetheless suspected a real danger and has been trying to arm himself against it. His weapons are wily cunning, deception, cheating, violence, cruelty, lying threats and murder. He must be dumbfounded that this arsenal has failed to bring his goal to realization. Even the most carefully designed onslaught of the evil one, ultimately vanishes in thin air.

With His public declaration of war on Satan, God also indicated the outcome of the struggle. Satan knew right from the start what to expect. But, being the father of lies, he was unable to believe it. The evil one has been assured that he has only one Adversary⁷⁵ and that knowledge causes him to shudder in spite of himself. But he is unable to believe that the Gospel message of that Adversary is true. He can mischievously distort it and does so repeatedly; even the most faithful servants of the Lord are often at loggerheads with each other regarding the interpretation of Scripture. It is the spirit of the evil one who drives them apart. Sometimes it seems all so easy that that probably scares the evil one too. God has weapons which Satan cannot imagine because they are far beyond his comprehension.

The Lord created the angels to be servants of mankind and gave these servants a certain authority which we human tend to call 'supernatural'. That is an error, for the angels are not supernatural in the sense that they are above nature. On the contrary, they were created to work together with human beings in history and they find their delight in this service. Their existence is so closely intertwined with the history of mankind that they even participate in the development of it and perform historically significant services in human lives. That is the reason the fallen angels are able to create so much havoc in the history of mankind. They are like a faithless butler, only too familiar with the house and temperament of their master, finding it easy to do damage where it hurts.

The original relationship between angels and human beings meant that angels, like people, are religiously bound to God. This very bond means freedom.

Without going into the remarkable and probably superfluous theological issue of whether angel were created in the image of God, we certainly claim that the angels have a close religious link with God and love Him so much that they cannot exist without Him or, as fallen angels, hate Him so much that their whole existence is poisoned by the awareness that in all eternity they can

⁷⁴ Genesis 3:15a

⁷⁵ James 2:19

never be free from Him. In all the periods of that eternity, as the smoke of their suffering rises relentlessly, they will be ceaselessly tortured by their unbelief: the idiotic notion that their irreversible defeat must have been an impossibility. If they could only fall down and repent, their pain would be eased. But fallen angels will never be able to believe that their defeat and permanent exile were inevitable, and such lack of faith will continue to consume them forever.

If we say that angels participate in human history, we imply that they participate in time. Maintaining this position is essential for understanding the book of Job. It was within time that Satan plotted against Job, and within time he saw his plans fail; before Job's days his power was greater than afterwards. There is only one 'time': the time of creation and of this world. The theoretical speculation that angels somehow belong within a different order of time seriously handicaps us in understanding the teaching of Scripture. Angels have a helping role in human history: they arrived right on time over the fields around Bethlehem.⁷⁶ They serve people who exist in time, therefore they, too, must be included within time. But the kingdom of darkness lacks a necessary sense of time. Satan always arrives too late. He invariably misses the opportune moment. Even at the hour assigned to him by God, the hour Jesus called, "...this is your hour, --when darkness reigns"⁷⁷ he missed the critical moment. God always beats him to it. This drives him on and makes him furious, a condition comparable to human frustration, only infinitely worse. The real Satan has none of the carefree, even humorous character of Mephistopheles. He works in a maddened rush and still arrives too late.

In the first two chapters of the book of Job, Satan is portrayed as a powerful creature who has chosen his own way. He was able to choose that way because of the freedom granted him which he wasted in his rebellion.⁷⁸ Consequently he became a compulsive, driven creature, lacking freedom and propelled by his own malice. He consumes himself in endless bitterness. Salvation is impossible for him nor may anyone pray for the deliverance of fallen angels. *Why* this is so, God only knows but all of us know for sure *that* it is so. The evil one did not remain in the truth and must now live a lie- if we can call that *living*. The only sustenance he has is the lie; there is no alternative. He has never fully accepted his defeat at the hands of the descendant of the woman, nor has he accepted that his continuous existence will be that of one whose head will be crushed. He experienced a foretaste of his defeat in the faithfulness of Job and received the crushing blow at Golgotha, yet he refused to believe it. He lives with the lie of :you never

⁷⁶ See Luke 2:9

⁷⁷ Luke 22:53; also see Matthew 27:45, Lk 23:44, Mark 15:33; but John 19:19ff. indicates that here too God, not Satan, was in control.

⁷⁸ Revelations 12:7-9; also see Lk 10:18

know⁷⁹. He still tries to succeed in his arrogant plan; it is most remarkable that sometimes he seems to succeed. His success may even go quite far. All *success* for the sake of *success* has something demonic about it. Success is not the same as blessing although sometimes they appear to be the same. They can be distinguished just as truth is distinguishable from its caricature.

Satan used to mingle with the sons of God (1:6). He did not belong there but he could still do it at the time of the story. That too was one of his ‘successes’: he brazenly crashed the meeting of the faithful angels, --and it worked! Later he could not do that anymore, and that is another indication that he was definitely bound by the temporal development of salvation history. The days of the time in which Job lived were glorious days for the ruler of darkness. Satan had not yet been thrown out of heaven and, with some justification, he could claim to be the ruler of the earth. It was precisely in the days of Job that the world experienced a general falling away. In the end only one small group of people remained to serve the Lord and even they were ‘a stiff necked people’ insulting God by serving idols on their journey to the promised land.⁸⁰

But the evil one could take no enjoyment from the glow of his worldwide success. Nor does he really know how to enjoy anything; true joy is unknown to him. His constant inclination to anger, on the one hand, and his shuddering fear, on the other hand, crush any joy he might have experienced. Satan may advertise his own grandeur, appear imposing and pretend to be an angel of light in power and wisdom, but in fact he remains desperately wretched. No creature is more evil and none more miserable than Satan. True, he mingled among the sons of God but he knew he did not belong there. Even his brazen attitude could not help him in the end.

God addressed him with regal calmness, “Where have you come from?” (1:7). This was not an admission of Satan’s limited rights, but an expression of God’s majesty. The Lord in His sovereignty asked him a question and he had to answer. That was a bitter pill to swallow because Satan has always suffered from an incurable fantasy that some day in the future he will be successful in capturing God’s throne and occupying it himself. Somewhere deep down he must know that it is impossible but he refuses to accept that in his addiction to the notion of power. No success, however sweet, will ever quench his thirst for power.

When God addressed him, his response seemed reasonable for a moment as he answered grudgingly, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it” (1:7b).

However, his answer revealed a taunting arrogance. Large parts of the earth had already fallen to him. More and more he has gained the confidence to consider himself the “ruler of the

⁷⁹ See: Rev. 12:17.

⁸⁰ Ex. 32:9; Amos 5:25ff.

world”⁸¹. Yet somehow it eluded him, something did not fit. He could deceive whole nations and motivate nations to almost immeasurably imperialistic conquests. It has even seemed, at times, to go too easily; then, suddenly, he may stumble across a community, a family, or a single person on whom all his scheming lies, his violence and power fail to make an impact. And these are not unusual people; they tend to be weak, sinful, confused, forgetful and even simple minded. It shows how vain Satan’s secret bragging about his power is. Even when he didn’t understand the question, he had to answer it. It was equally difficult for him to understand that God gave him this opportunity to give such an arrogant answer, insinuating that he had traversed the earth (which was then as now the stage for human history) and that he had made unbelievable conquests.

But the Lord was not interested in his subtle bragging and asked, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him!”(1:8).

That was a painful question, for as long as there was even *one* faithful person like Job on the earth, Satan’s dominance could falter. And then, there was Job! It was terrible for the evil one to know that God’s Word was true; it hurt him miserably.

“There is no one on earth like him, upright and blameless, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). In these words Satan must have sensed his eternal condemnation and this brought on his terrible fear and trembling. It went contrary to all his calculations: a descendant of Adam (the fallen one), maintaining such blameless righteousness right in the midst of a world which had so quickly fallen under his spell. Satan could not help but slander this man and at the same time, concoct a devilish plan against him. He saw it as quite a chance since God seemed to play right into his hand. He was not going to miss this one! Like a despondent gambler, knowing the stakes full well, he answered that he would like to believe that but,

“Does Job fear God for nothing?..”(vs9).

..Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?”(vs 10a).

“But stretch out you hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face” (vs 11).

This was a terribly rude and arrogant answer. It was also a game of chance that could only arise in the mind of a most cowardly creature. It was as if the evil one was purposely numbing, himself to an idea which he knew to be false. He must have been shocked when God responded with a

⁸¹ Cf. Ephesians 2:2;

simple, “Very well...”(vs 12).

The Lord said “Very well..” and Satan shuddered. He was suspicious. There has never been a person who suffered from paranoia who was as suspicious as Satan. He has never been able to figure out where God is coming from. And now God had given him free reign, within limits. Was this a trick? He might have suspected a trap but he could not see when the trap would be sprung. It all looked so straightforward.

Nevertheless he would make use of the opportunity. His free reign was very broad and he could not fathom the reason. But all his successes were spoiled by the presence of Job, a man without peer. If he could succeed in making this Job fall, he would have inflicted on God, the One he hates and mistrusts and who would never let go of him, more damage than in deceiving a hundred nations.

We could explain all this as a Hebrew literary style as a specific way of composition and story-telling or as a *fantasy* in the middle eastern style. It may seem that this manner of speaking about God and Satan was rather naive. Or we could refer to such a portrayal of God, with its naivete, as a good counter balance to contemporary thought patterns. We could take other paths in an attempt to get closer to the meaning of the book of Job. But there is one thing we must not fail to note, namely that God Himself has chosen this very method of informing us about the person and work of Satan. We need to know something about this powerful fallen creature who worms his way also into our lives and who heads a very powerful organization held together by cruelty. This too is Gospel! To ignore it means to lack the necessary weapons against his onslaught.

Satan proceeded to follow his deviant way. He had been given the go-ahead to unleash all his power against Job’s riches and even his children. And his power is substantial provided he is not restrained. He is so powerful that those who have not been instructed by God’s Word inevitably believe that Satan is a great god. He has been destined to serve mankind but has become a perfectly deceitful servant. Especially because he was created to be a servant did he know so well how to inflict the greatest damage.

The book of Job recalls the event. What was reported there about Satan’s activities still reflects his normal work. These are his usual activities when God does not restrain him. We are right in sensing something demonic in natural disasters, sickness, accident and murder. He is a murderer from the beginning.⁸² But he can never act against God’s orders. These orders constrain him, even though he hates it.

In the case of Job, Satan had a special advantage because Job had little knowledge of the personality and work of Satan. Presumably he knew of Satan's existence but not of his great power. Because his knowledge about Satan was vague, it would not have been difficult for him to ascribe all his suffering to God Himself.

Yet that did not happen. Job remained faithful. It was another disappointment for the evil one. Once again he had miscalculated the scope of faith. The evil one must have been deeply shocked at this overwhelming proof of Job's righteousness. He had known nothing of Satan's plot and, stripped of all his possessions (*raped* may be a better term since his possessions were, after all, a part of him and his position in the community), and robbed of his children, Job nevertheless remained the man whose equal in flawless righteousness and abhorrence of evil, could not be found.

We might consider this impossible and then we are right. We cannot get a clear picture of Job, for we have nothing with which to compare him. We can form a judgement about many other people but not about Job. God said of him that there was no one like him and we can't argue that away. Neither before him nor after him has there ever been anyone like Job among the children of Adam. Only the great divine Offspring of Mary excels Job. But He, Jesus Christ, cannot fully be considered and offspring of Adam, for he is the seed of the woman, no inheritor of the sin of Adam.

Job's friends too, in their own way, would say that it was impossible and we need not elevate ourselves above them. We are, by nature, inclined to judge him in the same way.

Even the evil one, who can see so much more clearly into human hearts, came to the conclusion that it was impossible! But when Satan appeared before God the second time, he did not say so. He was totally silent about Job's righteousness even though he feared it greatly. God knew that but also ignored it.

Then Satan dared to take his second chance. He probably suspected that he might pay dearly for such a gamble but, like an addict, he believed that he might still succeed. He became more and more involved, whether he wanted to or not, because his total malice drove him along mercilessly. No human being, not even a murderer, would turn so mercilessly against himself as Satan did. No creature is so hopelessly unhappy and yet undeserving of any pity. His present misery is as complete as his former happiness was before his rebellion. He will never be able to let go of his infatuation with lying.

After the demonic acts of war, robbery, storm, accidents and murder, he turned to

⁸² See John 8:44

diabolical acts of sickness, decay and, obviously, terminal illness.

This was the point at which the real struggle for Job began. In that struggle the evil one knew how to seduce the friends into betraying their friendship by spouting seemingly orthodox sermons. They too became part of Job's crisis. Their spiritual poverty came to the surface. Their sermonizing revealed the urging of the evil one, regardless of the proverbial wisdom they seemed to string together. Those who take divine wisdom and mix it with demonic prompting into an ugly synthesis, are always Satan's most effective tools.

Satan must have been glued to his seat, observing Job's quarrels with his friends. He must have been intoxicated with his apparent success. Things couldn't have been better! A pious man was being driven towards hell by the pious words of his own friends. But it must have been even more terrifying for Satan when he discovered that the whole plan was not at all developing according to his expectations.

With great consternation he noted that the growing ferocity of the friends' advice reached a brief climax and then fizzled out into an insecure loss of focus. But he did not want to believe that he would lose the game. He could not have suspected and did not want to believe that in his mortal pain and anguish, Job was preparing the way for a wider and deeper revelation from God; wider and deeper than had been known up to that time; a revelation anticipating the fuller gospel for New Testament believers. That must have caused shuddering in Satan's heart. He had to discover, time and again, that he did not understand human history after all and that, even with the tremendous power he had been granted, he ultimately could not inflict damage on historical developments in his own favour.

If he had hoped that the narrow views of Elihu would hurt Job more than the unfaithfulness of the other three friends, then, in that too, he would be disappointed. Job was not hurt by Elihu's narrow views but rather experienced the warmth of brotherly love which flowed through the fierce and, at times, unsure and changeable words spoken out of the kindness of Elihu's heart. Elihu tried and, in spite of himself, succeeded in calling the estranged Job back into the fold of the community.

In the end, the Lord himself came to speak with Job, just as he had spoken with Satan. But his tone was completely different: it was that of a father with his child. The evil one sensed the impending total defeat and shivered with fear at the realization that he would always suffer and ultimately be completely crushed.

These make up the sorrows of Satan. But he didn't give up. He still had lots of time before the Redeemer would come to the earth. He still had room enough for his demonic games. In

addition, Job was receiving stern corrections. But there was no judgement and that must have confused Satan. Perhaps he was vaguely aware that the kindly tone of a father's love prevailed. The speech about the animals must have struck him as an absurdity. Was not he, Satan, in control among the animals? Could he not drive the wild animals in rebellion against people, even so far as to maim and kill them? How much power did God really have left in the animal kingdom?

Satan could not free himself from such figments of his imagination. In fact, that was all he had left. And Job's first answer, "I put my hand over my mouth"(40:4) may have offered him new hope. It may have seemed to be the attitude of a recalcitrant child, hiding in stubbornness. That would have been familiar to Satan who understood disobedience and stubbornness. If only he could trap Job into such a state of mind so that he would get stuck in his own stubborn posture, Satan could still win the game even if at the last moment defeat seemed inevitable.

Then, with amazement, Satan listened in on the second speech of God to his child Job. Had he overestimated the Almighty One so much? In this second speech God sounded alarmed, even somewhat desperate. But the result of this speech was totally perplexing. Even though there was nothing new in the content of this speech, Job became a changed person. He must have felt God's disquietude and suddenly recognized the Almighty God as a caring Father. That was how near to God he drew and how near God drew to him.

"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5).

Job had prematurely entered a new era. This was unbearable to Satan. It killed the last vestiges of his hope and he must have left the scene in furious bitterness, knowing full well that he had lost this round.

Yet as he was leaving he may have noticed something that momentarily surprised him. Those three friends of Job who had played such a miserable role were not condemned but received grace. Enough was enough! Now Satan had all the proof he needed to know that his Opponent was a poor strategist; totally unfit to be King of the Universe. He gave mercy to traitors!

Throughout the ages and till the end of time, many kindred spirits of the three friends would time and again act out of their spiritual poverty, leaving the church hamstrung and giving the evil one encouragement to continue his disobedient attempts to destroy the faithful.

2. Eliphaz

Eliphaz was the first of the three friends to speak after Job's imprecatory prayer. His speech was critical yet not without kindness. He was probably the oldest and we may surmise that his presentation was bound by certain conventions, for example regarding the oldest being the first to speak and saying everything on his heart without being interrupted. Job answered him at length. Next would come the second eldest who would also be allowed to say all he wished. These conventions revealed considerable civility. There was none of that terrible, western convention of constant interruptions or talking when someone else was still speaking. Good manners were the norm and it is possible that they spoke in a spontaneous form of poetry. Some examples of that still exist today.

Eliphaz was called the 'Temanite'. According to Genesis 36:4ff., Esau had a son Eliphaz and this Eliphaz had a son named Teman. That is why it is often presumed that the Eliphaz of the book of Job was a distant descendant of this Teman and therefore an Edomite. It is also possible that Teman is the name of a town. But Eliphaz could not have been a distant descendant of Esau if we assume that the history of the man Job took place in the time of the patriarchs, e.g. the time that the Israelites moved to Egypt.

We are dealing with a number of uncertainties and there are ways in which we can accept them. Many scholars have assumed a critical position towards the Bible because of uncertainties of interpretation, especially as ongoing scholarly work in history, language studies and archaeology have strengthened their resolve. Nevertheless it is presumptuous to place the authority of philology above the authority of the Scriptures. At least, their choice reveals their admission of the need for authority of one kind or another. But it is not clear why the authority of the Scriptures should be exchanged for the authority of a scholarly method. One might compare the reader of the Scriptures with someone looking at a partially faded advertisement painted on a wall. Some letters are clear while others are faint and uncertain. Thus, if the Bible is indeed God's Word, as is assumed in the traditional reformed position, how do we explain passages which are quite unclear. Even the question itself is somewhat precipitous. One does not have to take refuge in a teaching of 'special providence' regarding what has happened to the Scriptures in history in order to grasp the reliability and infallibility of the Scriptures and of the ultimate reliability of the text as written. Whoever rejects such an infallibility as traditionally understood in the historic reformed creeds, can only do so on the basis of their own faith commitment even though they may not do so consciously. Admitting uncertainties or being reluctant to make a judgement are not necessarily irreconcilable with faith in the infallibility of the Scriptures or the

text as it was finally written. It is important that we do not become overzealous in dealing with these issues nor allow ourselves to be tempted into discussions which can only result in damaging our position.

The descendants of Esau appear to have maintained considerable knowledge of God's Word-revelation and may even have increased their knowledge through other sources. The Bible speaks about the Wisdom of Teman⁸³ and the descendants of Esau may have been responsible for a traditional wisdom of which the Eliphaz of our book of Job was perhaps a founder. He did speak with some authority; the tone of his argumentation reminds one of a person who, over the long period of his life, had reflected much. He may well have been a teacher of a small community, but he seemed to have been inclined to enjoy the sound of his own voice. When we pay careful attention to his arguments we notice that his wisdom was wide and deep and multi-faceted; we may even say that it compared well with the development of wisdom among the Israelites.

It is also clear that the wisdom of Teman had a moralistic trait. Eliphaz spoke highly of God's power and holiness but was not consistent in his trust of Him. He spoke of the holiness of God in a way which was not fully scriptural. For Eliphaz, God was so holy that He regarded His angels as impure. In this we not only find an overvaluation of the realm of angels but also a contrast between God and His creatures, implying that everything created would be regarded as impure in God's eyes by virtue of its creatureliness. Eliphaz was well-supplied with revelation knowledge but had added foreign elements and given it a different flavour. Accurate insights based on Word-revelation were mingled with ideas arising only from the human heart. Such wisdom was not from on high but, according to the letter of James, worldly, unspiritual and demonic. The views of Eliphaz reflected much which was unspiritual and worldly. That was an indication of the influence of the ruler of darkness.

Eliphaz did not have accurate knowledge regarding the true cause of human misery. He lacked a true and full religious confession of guilt. When his different sense of guilt was vehemently rejected by Job, Eliphaz was hurt to the core of his being; for, with heart and mind, he believed in human goodness. He regarded such goodness as profitable for salvation; where virtue did not get such a reward, goodness too could not exist, according to Eliphaz. The discussions with Job brought Eliphaz's deepest convictions to light and proved them to be diametrically opposed to the view of Job, even though they often used the same words. Like Job, Eliphaz came to a crisis in his life.

The moralism of Eliphaz contained a touch of mysticism. He told the story of a revelation that he had. One night he saw a spirit. This story tells us something about the character of Eliphaz. He obviously had a great respect for angels and spirits, considering them superhuman and supernatural. That was why he attached such great importance to this revelation which may have been nothing more than a figment of his imagination. We must remind ourselves that these people lived at the time when God's Word-revelation was not yet completed. In Elihu's speeches we hear of God's revelation in dreams and visions. One may surmise that at that time, God did reveal Himself in that way among those people and that some parts of the Old Testament recorded were based on such experiences. But we do notice a difference between the reports of Elihu and Eliphaz. The Temanite spoke of an experience which frightened him,

fear and trembling seized me,
and made all my bones shake.
A spirit glided past my face,
and the hair on my body stood on end.
It stopped,
but I could not tell what it was.
A form stood before my eyes,
and I heard a hushed voice:" (4:14-16).

The actual words of the strange apparition proved to be rather disappointing; they reflected Eliphaz's own convictions, "Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his maker?" (vs 17).

The beliefs of Eliphaz increased the distance between God and human beings, unlike the faith of Job who in the days of his former prosperity had enjoyed God's intimate friendship (29:4).

Elihu had a view which was more down to earth than that of Eliphaz. According to him God did speak in various ways to people but they did "not perceive it" (33:14). He revealed Himself in a dream or in a vision of the night, but such a revelation was primarily a reminder. He used it to open ears and emphasize the warnings which had been addressed to them. In this way people were reminded of what they already knew. Elihu also offered another option: perhaps a person might have become ill and have full opportunity for reflection. This passage was followed

by a mighty prophetic pronouncement of a mediator, “one out of a thousand” (33:23), a term which appears to be used in wisdom literature in reference to the Messiah.

In comparison with both Job’s testimony and Elihu’s confession, the mystical experience of Eliphaz appeared as a rather strange basis for belief in a God who remained distant. While he referred to a supernatural being who spoke, the words spoken clearly reflected Eliphaz’ own opinion: namely, that being created implied a kind of defilement. The confession of a distant God belonged to a moralistic stance whereas a confession of God’s nearness allowed religion its full value.

Eliphaz may well have been the oldest of the three friends and his manners, in comparison to the others, appears to be above reproach. Though not consistently on a high niveau, he did manage to recover his equilibrium quickly enough. Eliphaz seems to have been more mild-mannered and humane than either Bildad or Zophar. But even Eliphaz gave strong opposition to Job and his confession. This crisis tore the friendship apart. When left to the spiritual poverty of their own opinion, the three friends not only united in rejecting Job’s so-called arrogance but among themselves they also discovered a conflict of positions: Bildad did not agree with Eliphaz and Zophar differed from Bildad.

Job certainly could not have foreseen that his friends would treat him so shabbily. There must once have been a shared understanding which was now being challenged. Eliphaz had been a friend and Job could never have suspected that he would desert him so shamelessly. They used to understand one another. Job might well have known of the moralistic streak in his friend’s thoughts but, up to this point, had not realized how poisonous that moralism could get when threatened.

If Job was right, it followed, that the position of Eliphaz had been found wanting. They could not have maintained both positions.

Probably, Job did not know that he himself, with his complaint and struggling, had helped to advance God’s revelation of Himself. As a matter of fact, Job had said, instead, that he wished to have his words written up in a book, or scratched with an iron pen on lead, or engraved for eternity into a rock (19:23ff.). That actually proved his desperate situation. He felt that he was dying and his words would die with him. He could not have known that the suffering and misunderstanding he experienced would be the very instruments used by God to further His Self-revelation through the Word. Job’s ignorance regarding God’s purpose and Satan’s plot was part of his task to suffer.

Job had no idea that as he poured out his heart, he added to God’s instruction for

humanity. Of course this made it very hard for him to understand his friends' opposition.

These friends, though unaware of their role, gave fierce resistance to the advance of God's Word-revelation. They knew only the revelation which was known in their time and they considered that to be quite sufficient without need for expansion. But because they had matched that Word-revelation with wisdom from other sources, they now discovered the difficulties of the synthesis they had accepted as truth: it was a precarious balance of thought which could not tolerate too much tinkering. Any synthesis of diverse wisdoms does not easily tolerate reformation or accept a renewal in revelation and it tolerates even less the advances God's Word-revelation makes for our benefit.

Eliphaz was a man of wisdom and stature who did not want to see his wisdom threatened by a more lucid revelation of God's mercy. That would have upset his carefully devised synthesis. With all his appreciation for wisdom from on high, Eliphaz nevertheless, proved to be a strong opponent of reformation even a major reformation taking place here in the events in the life of Job! This was a reformation in which Old Testament faith was advanced almost to the very gates of the New Testament Gospel of the Kingdom.

Such a counter-reformational tendency and pious resistance to progress may be found in all three friends and even Elihu was not altogether free of it. Moralism, mysticism and counter reformation would continue to play a devastating role in the course of history.

It is noteworthy that Eliphaz did not make room for further revelation as it came to him in a very special way: the fearful vision in the night. Yet when Job advanced God's Self-revelation in a wide-awake, down-to-earth discussion, Eliphaz objected strongly.

The character of Eliphaz was clearly revealed in his discussion with Job. He could have used the incident to come to better self-knowledge but instead he became hardened in his position. His second discussion with Job (chapter 15) indicated much less compassion than the first speech. He boasted of his age and accused Job of self-righteousness. With excessive egotism he equated Temanite wisdom with the revealed truth from God. Forgetting himself he resorted to hateful expressions, "Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash...?" (15:12). Afterwards he reverted to his old views regarding God's holiness in comparison with which all creatures were defiled. Such views eliminated any meaningful distinction between what was created or fallen into sin. They also placed God beyond human understanding. In his desire to safeguard his own wisdom he defended a theology which presented the Lord as an unidentifiable stranger; a God who was inestimably distant and at the same time almost unreliable. He was *Deus absconditus*, a hidden God; he was also *Deus exlex*, a God of chance. In

His incomprehensible holiness He was so far removed from us that He could not speak to us and we could not pray to Him. We could not exercise our faith in talking with Him. And if He sent one of his servants to us, someone who was far below Him and even impure in His eyes, even this servant of the distant God appeared frightful to human beings. We would not be in a position to plead our cause with such a God because he would not understand our language and we would not understand His words to us. The best we could do would be to accommodate ourselves to His incomprehensible decrees.

Eliphaz' words about God were not right. He spoke about a powerful distant and arbitrary God. What he was really talking about was God's absence while Job, without hesitation, maintained God's nearness. Eliphaz, however, needed to maintain God's distance to allow room for his own self-styled righteousness.

The third speech of Eliphaz was less fierce than the second. Eliphaz had lost something of his certainty. He may even have felt some shame about his failure as a friend and his loss of dignity. But he got past that and began to make wild accusations against Job, saying things that he could never have proved. His claims were groundless and he encouraged himself by adopting an arrogant tone. Were we to ask what drove him, we might find the explanation in his belief that Job's heart, too, must have been full of evil, like that of all other people. Even if, outwardly, Job's life appeared to be exemplary, there was always his hidden, inner life which could have been less irreproachable. If our theorizing is correct, Eliphaz may have considered himself right in making such assumptions without needing further evidence. Of course normally he would have guessed correctly. However, among the offspring of Adam there was one exception: namely, Job! Therefore it has become nearly impossible for us to give an accurate assessment of Job's character.

Eliphaz clung stubbornly to his moralism; it was all he had. He had live out of his own perverted overestimation of morality and it had caused him to stumble in the moral obligation of love towards a friend in need. No one comes as close to inhumane behaviour as a humanist. Yet Eliphaz saw no way of getting beyond his moralism. He was also engaged in a struggle to maintain his faith in human virtue. He used orthodox terms and even gave significant advice, such as one might not expect from a moralist: "Submit to God" (22:21). He was evidently trying hard to win Job over to his side in this spiritual struggle but Job could not betray his faith or his God.

3. Bildad

Bildad was not an imposing figure like Eliphaz. He may have been a little younger and could not claim to have much wisdom. He may even have been a little jealous of Eliphaz' dignity and reputation. Although he had to acknowledge the Temanite as his superior, his speech to Job was filled with criticism of the speech of Eliphaz. The reason was that Bildad did not think in moralistic terms; he emphatically confessed the nearness of God. He did not appeal to some marvelous experience but to tradition. His insinuation about the children of Job was heartless (8:4). Though he was no moralist, there was something callous in his attitude. Proceeding differently from Eliphaz, he made no more progress than the latter. If we had to say what would typify Bildad's attitude, it would be that he was *too* orthodox.

Bildad may have been a descendant of Abraham and Keturah. If this is true he may well have resented the fact that he had to yield to a descendant of the unfaithful Esau. This is supported by his appeal, not to wisdom or special revelation, but to tradition and the forefathers. "For we were born only yesterday and know nothing,... [but] ask the former generations" (8:9,8). He applied that to both Job and Eliphaz. The strong moralistic accent so much appreciated by Eliphaz, was absent in Bildad's speeches.

The first speech of Bildad sounded like what we might expect from Israelites, more so than the speech of Eliphaz. We might almost call it more scriptural. In his second speech (chapter 18) he again spoke more about righteousness in the biblical sense and in this way rejected the moralism of Eliphaz. He did it politely yet unmistakably. We will see that Bildad's words had a greater effect on Job than those of Eliphaz. Bildad's attitude had something very appealing for Job, even more so because Bildad did not harp back on earlier sins which Job might have committed so much as focus on Job's present stubbornness. Bildad got a lot closer than Eliphaz to the questions that burned in Job's heart.

This second friend was well ahead in his reliability and consistency. He had a simple viewpoint, namely, that at this time Job was under God's judgement, a fact which even Job himself was unable to refute. According to Bildad, speculation about sins of the past had little value, especially since all evidence was lacking. But he claimed that Job had to accept the present judgement. Yet it was this judgement which continued to be incomprehensible to Job. He knew that God's favour was a gift of grace but wondered why he was experiencing rejection. If he could have accepted this present judgement unconditionally he would have been building a righteousness for himself which would have proved enduring. Bildad's words were much more

difficult to refute than those of Eliphaz. Bildad's second speech contained a tremendous temptation for Job.

Job appears to have felt the power of Bildad's argument but also the animosity which showed through the well-phrased words of the traditionalist. That made him uneasy because there was no obvious reason for Bildad's animosity. In that, Bildad came close to Eliphaz. We may note here that in his response, Job appealed to the love owed among friends as he answered Bildad's second speech. "Have pity on me, my friends, have pity" (19:21). Nor should it escape our attention that, right after the second speech of Bildad, Job reached another of his surprising heights of faith,

"...after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God" (19:26).

He continued by speaking about the divine judgement which would come upon those who neglected the call to love their friends.

The third speech of Bildad was conspicuously short. He was losing ground and found it necessary to use arguments which he had avoided and even criticized before this. He claimed that human beings could not be pure before God but at the same time he did remain consistent in his description of the creatures, avoiding mention of angels and supernatural beings and claiming that the moon and stars were not pure in God's eyes.

Then he stopped abruptly. He seemed to feel that he had gone too far, even beyond his own original agenda. He must have had opportunity to speak longer and to have said all he wanted to say without being interrupted. It would have been his right to continue speaking at length. As a matter of fact, it would have been expected of him. But his speech was unusually brief. Job may even have considered it impolite.

Bildad did not find the struggle with Job to be an easy one. He had to admit that his arguments went too far in the direction of Eliphaz though that had certainly not been his intention. Perhaps he lost his bearings somewhat, not only through what Job said but also through the arguments of Eliphaz. But he may have been confused most of all by the sharp words of the least noble of the three friends, Zophar.

4. Zophar

Zophar was called the Naamathite; a description that is not very helpful. On rather spurious grounds he has been considered to be of Edomite origin. But this, if true, still does not get us very far. He had none of the nobility of Eliphaz; from the start his behaviour was base. He called Job an idle talker, a mocker and witless (11:2,12). Even though Job answered him at length his second speech showed no improvement. Such a boorish attitude to a friend in trouble was hard to explain, especially when we remember that Zophar, like Eliphaz and Bildad, had made a long trip to commiserate with Job. And like Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar too was overwhelmed by Job's misery. But in argumentation he was by far the most insensitive of the three.

For Zophar too, his meeting with Job became a spiritual crisis, revealing some of his deepest convictions, whether he was aware of them or not. Of course, we must not forget that Zophar did not get the floor until the other two friends had spoken, and Job had answered them. This appears to have frustrated Zophar, for, in his second speech, he mentioned his inner turmoil (20:2). Zophar was not able to control himself nor keep his dignity any more than the other two friends. Even if it were true that Zophar was a distant relative of Eliphaz, his views were nevertheless, radically different. He did not lose himself in moralism, nor did he move in the direction of Bildad's view of righteousness but, rather, he placed all emphasis on the mystery and incomprehensibility of God. This was a position considered by Eliphaz as well but for the latter it served his moralism, making room for his faith in basic human virtue. With Zophar, however, the mysteriousness of God seemed to be central and righteousness more ancillary. Thus two issues become clear to us. First, Zophar, even more than the other two, found his conscience pricked. The very heart of his religious convictions had been frayed significantly by the words of Job. Secondly, his criticism was also directed to the others. To some extent he agreed with Eliphaz' morality and Bildad's righteousness but he assigned them a less important place. And so this crisis drove the friends apart as well.

It is noteworthy how often Zophar proclaimed God's mysteriousness in terms that allude to God's sovereignty. Job was not tempted by these allusions as he was by Bildad's words. Yet he must have found them distracting and difficult to refute.

The three friends were united in their rejection of Job's attitude and position. But amongst themselves they became involved in a peculiar, religious competition. In the second round of speeches we see each of them in turn, astutely picking up the thread of the argument

directed towards him and using it to sharpen his own competitive edge. Zophar's weapon against Job (but also against the other two friends) was his teaching of the mysteriousness of God. He presented his doctrine intelligently, at least at the start. In his first speech he managed to control himself well, presenting a comprehensive insight into his position and avoiding excessive 'personal attacks'. He even offered a sort of encouragement. In this respect he did not want to be outdone by his friends (cf. the end of chapters 5 and 8).

The second and last speech of Zophar was significantly less polished than the first. We may wonder if even before he finished this speech, he had decided not to take part in the third round. He spoke of being very agitated (20:2). Again he presented the apostate idea of the mysteriousness of God, but as he spoke he gradually and almost imperceptibly, shifted focus. Thus Zophar came closer, perhaps more than he might have wished, to the moralism of Eliphaz and to Bildad's accent on righteousness. We may ask ourselves whether he had noticed this himself and therefore decided not to speak a third time. The other two had needed a third round before falling silent (it is, of course, true that Bildad's third speech was very short and we will return to this point later).

What should we think of Zophar's refusal to take part in the third round of speeches? One may assume that participation was both a right of all participants and expected as basic civil conduct. Bildad fulfilled this obligation, enough to place him between Eliphaz and Zophar, in this respect. Eliphaz maintained a princely demeanor while Zophar showed rudeness in neglecting his duty. Bildad did maintain a polite conduct in fulfilling his duty by giving a very brief speech.

Zophar's behaviour must have surprised the others. Apparently they had not yet realized that they too were driven in that same direction. He must surely have had some serious reasons for such boorishness in breaking the rules of the game. Zophar's purpose to instruct Job by using an approach which would avoid the disadvantages of Eliphaz' arguments and Bildad's behaviour failed dismally. His method was both impolite and immoral. Zophar got terribly worked up and suddenly realized that he had not only failed to convince Job but had failed to avoid the shortcomings of the arguments of his friends.

But he did not admit to it.

He may even have gloated a little over the failures of the other two who also stopped speaking without accomplishing their objective or admitting their failure.

In this way the three friends went down to defeat together. The rules for civility in discussions shared several features with the rule of law. When the friends failed to convict Job of sin, they did not have the right to continue considering him guilty. As Elihu later pointed out at

length, the three friends had to either prove Job's guilt or acknowledge his innocence. They did neither. This took the discussions to a dead end whereas the intention of the dialogue was to find a communal resolution.

Despite some serious slips, Eliphaz managed to maintain his dignity throughout these discussions but he was compelled to limit himself by clinging to moralism as his only hope and support. Bildad did not do as well. His third speech with its remarkable brevity, tottered on the brink of violating the rules for good conduct and in its briefness announced his defeat. Zophar, on the other hand, lacked the confidence even to begin a third speech and preferred breaking the rules of good conduct to exposing himself to the risk of another miserable failure.

United in their condemnation of Job's position, the friends were likewise united in their silence and refusal to admit their failure at proving Job's guilt. Each of them maintained his own deepest conviction and would not be swayed by Job's view. They were stubborn in halting their search for truth and would rather wrap themselves in sullen silence than admit their failure.

We have noted how the churlish attitude of the three friends (particularly Zophar) had given Job a rough time throughout the verbal struggle. Many times Job was shaken and came close to giving up. He may even have been surprised to discover himself the winner in the whole ordeal, or, at least, not the loser. He kept the faith. He also kept faith with his friends and maintained his love for his neighbour. But he had not convinced his friends and it must have pained him to discover how deep a religious abyss separated him from his friends.

And so we come to the contribution of the young, well-meaning but narrow-minded Elihu.

5. Elihu

Before Elihu began his speech, Job took the opportunity to speak quietly about what really bothered him. In a way this meant a triumph for him. None of the three friends had the desire or courage to continue opposing him openly. In turn, they were admitting defeat but there was also another important element in this event.

If I should say to my neighbour, “I will not speak to you anymore”, when I have been unable to expose the error of his position, I am committing an injustice by denying him his right as my neighbour. However if I should say, “I see no way of continuing a constructive discussion but am willing to take it up again, so, please return another time”, or, “ We must stop this discussion now, because we are too tired or worked up about the issue to continue at this time”, we are approaching the matter differently. A blank refusal to speak further contains a deep injustice, for it implies a denial that he or she is our neighbour, a person God has placed beside us. Such refusal is in fact a criticism of God.

Job, too, must have felt that clearly. First his friends had disappointed him with their talk but now they disappointed him with their silence, their ‘we-won’t-talk-to-you-anymore’ attitude. In this way, all three of them filled to the brim the measure of their unrighteousness.

Again we note that, even now, Job tried to open a door for them. He did not share their silence nor did he respond to them in kind. Instead he spoke quietly, clearly and with sorrow. Chapters 27 and 31 are among the most eloquent of the whole book. This eloquence was remarkable for the sensitivity with which Job attempted to help his friends renew the discussion. He wanted to clarify for them, his own deepest commitment of faith and he tried to remove any possible misunderstanding that might have arisen from the passionate expression of his suffering. In these chapters we meet Job as the careful person who held a special in-house worship service after each party held by his children. He also spoke here of the godless for whom there was no hope; he was certain his friends knew that as well. He wanted to make sure that his friends were not left with the wrong impression about his position from the earlier talks. He reiterated his position, talking of wisdom which could and a wisdom which could not be found, and gently reminding and warning them of the seriousness of forgetting to make this important distinction. Referring to his former prosperity, he emphasized how seriously he had regarded his personal piety in those days, and how he had been blessed accordingly. Those were the days when,

“...his lamp shone upon my head
and by his light I walked through darkness!
...when God’s intimate friendship blessed my house” (29:3,4).

He also spoke calmly of his present misery, made worse because he was no longer comforted by God and had lost the joy of faith. He was not presumptuous enough to claim that faith could exist without joy. He knew only too well that faith and joy belonged together.

In the moving 31st chapter Job spoke freely about his lifestyle, his strong principles, his behaviour in public and his practice of public worship. He referred only to verifiable facts and swore an oath regarding the truth of his statements.

In this way he indeed overcame the arguments of his friends but did not pride himself in it. Especially in these chapters, we get to know Job as a man of impeccable righteousness, particularly in his relations to the three friends who, after all, had fallen short of their duties of friendship and whose silence constituted a heartless judgement.

There was something else that bothered Job. Although he had managed to ward off the attack of his friends, he had not been able to assume their task. The riddle that tore at his heart was still not solved.

At this point in the book, a young man from among the people standing around, stepped forward. Though he was much younger than the three friends, Job knew him and was even kin to him, according to Genesis 22:21. If we were to assume that Job was between 70 and 80 years old when this calamity struck him, (the age at which Jacob travelled to his uncle Laban to find a wife) we may think of Elihu as about 30 years old because he called Job a very old man. But Job certainly would not have thought of himself as old prior to his illness. And after his unexpected recovery he lived another ‘full life’.

This Elihu was rather shy but could no longer remain silent. He needed many words to excuse himself, probably not only due to his youth but more because he realized that interrupting a discussion which had ended in deadlock would involve a transgression of expected good manners. But he could defend his action by referring to the failure of the three friends to fulfill their tasks of bringing the discussion to a conclusion; instead they wrapped themselves into stubborn silence. Though not an original participant, Elihu now got involved, justifying his action based on the failure of the others. This provided the opening for his participation.

The good-natured, reliable and bashful Elihu almost used all of the chapter to give his excuses and explanations of why he was getting involved. He represented the healthy orthodoxy of his time, even though it was limited in its vision and hardly representative of the full revelation

of God's mercy. Elihu was a very likeable person and we cannot blame him for feeling limited by his youth and for easing his way into the discussion at this point. His timidity came across as an asset. He even seemed to have had a calming affect on Job. We may also note that none of the three friends remarked on the forward behaviour of Elihu; they too may have been taken in by his modesty and congenial presence, his honesty and openness. Beyond that, his lengthy apology may well have moved the friends to regard him as a person of courtesy, good taste and integrity.

Apart from his youthful age and boldness, there was a third reason why Elihu was not at ease. He may have been related to Job by blood and certainly was close to him in faith. And he had clearly taken note of the lack of a spiritual bond between Job and his old friends. This spiritual estrangement evidenced in this story, was so deep that the friends had quite neglected their obligations of friendship and had hopelessly failed in their task to show love to a friend. That friendship was shattered now.

At this very painful moment, Elihu took the floor. He probably knew that he would not only pit himself against Job but also put the three friends to shame.

As we follow the speeches of Elihu, we find that little of what he said was new. He repeatedly changed the subject and basically failed miserably in his attempt to set things straight. This failure cannot simply be explained by the three causes of his insecurity: his youth, the boldness of his audacious intervention and his kinship with Job. Elihu failed because of his narrow vision and his inability to allow for an expansion in God's word-revelation. He did not make the mistake of using various extant and mutually exclusive views to construct a new thought-synthesis. Elihu was not one who served two masters but he wore spiritual blinders. That was why his effort too was bound to fail. Yet, his limitation had one advantage: that it represented the religiosity of the covenant children of his time, allowing Elihu to bring Job out of his isolation and back into the fold of the religious community.

We may surmise that Elihu and Job knew each other well and that Elihu had participated in the worship services led by his older and more influential relative (see chapter 31:33). We may assume that Job had exercised a significant influence on Elihu's life. If that was so we may even discover that in the present situation, Elihu was only teaching Job what what he had learned from him in the first place.

In the relationship between teacher and student, it is not unusual for the latter to place a different emphasis from his teacher on certain aspects of the material he has studied. And if the teacher is particularly gifted, the student may fail to keep up completely with the teacher's ongoing academic development. It may be profitable for us to read Elihu's speeches from this

perspective. We will first note 33:23 where we read about a supportive angel, a mediator, ‘one in a thousand’. Although none of the friends used this thought, Job himself did. We are reminded of 16:19 where Job spoke of a witness and an advocate. Comparing these two insights we note that Job’s view was broader than that of Elihu and it was probably also stronger than at any other time in his life. Elihu appeared to be appealing to Job’s own teaching, but he had not understood that teaching in all its depth. He could not now keep up with the growth in Job’s insights of faith.

This helps to explain the boldness with which the young Elihu overcame his reluctance to speak. He was a very likeable person who spoke to Job with disarming respect and even admitted that he wanted Job’s good name to be cleared (33:32). He spoke as a student to his teacher but courageously and irrespective of persons. In his second speech he even became a little too bold,

“What man is like Job,
who drinks scorn like water?” (34:7).

Yet we get the impression that Job was not hurt by this comment.

The brief introduction before Elihu’s speeches (32:1-6), serves to inform us that Elihu had taken sides against the friends for their failure in their discussions, their inability to admit that failure and their unrighteous violation of the sacrosanct customs in public exchange of ideas. Elihu would try to improve on their record and at first he seemed to succeed.

He had also chosen to oppose Job. His reasons for doing so were rather weak;

“...[he] became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.”(32:2)

From Job’s last speech he could have learned that Job certainly was not guilty of it in the way Elihu thought. In 31:33 Job testified on oath that, unlike Adam, he had not concealed his sins. Elihu may have thought that his friend had denied original sin but nothing was further from Job’s mind. Actually, we are not using correct terminology because the confession indicated by the words ‘original sin’ would have been impossible for Elihu and probably also for Job. It points to a detail of the confession not yet accessible to believers of that time. Job may have been more keen in making such distinctions than any of his contemporaries but even for him the issues were far less clear than for the contemporary church. It is true that Job may have used words that lead us to believe that he was denying his inherited sins. And it is therefore not so absurd that Elihu sensed something of that in Job’s words. Elihu had no clear insight into the Covenant relationship between God and his children. Even Job’s insight into God’s Covenant with his children was less clear than Abraham’s understanding.

Elihu’s knowledge of salvation was similarly marked by faulty vision, a symptom of stunted spiritual growth. For Elihu, salvation was an incidental event, a remote chance. He knew

of guardian angels and was familiar with the concept of an advocate who helped people maintain their innocence. And his use of the word 'angel' to refer to God, was not so unusual for his time. Jacob also use the word to indicate God in Genesis 48:16. But Elihu did not know about the scope and trustworthiness of God's mercy. And even though Job's knowledge of the Witness or Advocate was more advanced, his understanding of the vastness of God's plan of salvation was too incomplete for him to find the relief and comfort he was seeking in his distress. Only after the second speech of God did Job gain a clearer understanding of his redemption.

It is clear that Job did not accuse Elihu of being inconsistent. In Elihu's words he sensed his well-meaning intentions and recognized a kindred spirit. He could not have expected a mature insight from his young friend on issues that were not even clear to himself. Job must have noticed, however, that Elihu could not keep pace with him and, in that respect, Elihu was not alone. The book of Job has a depth which has posed difficulty not only for the believers of the old covenant. Even many believers today find it difficult to hear the Gospel in this book. It is the person of Job who confuses many. To acquire a good insight into the development of his faith, we need comparative study material and that does not exist, for the Lord Himself said of him,

"There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright,..." (1:8).

That is also the reason why we have trouble following the development of his faith. One could point to the aspects of his faith which failed to meet the grade but that still would not help us gain a clearer understanding of how his faith grew. Job, grappling with the views of his friends during the discussions, proved to be centuries ahead of his time. We notice with surprise that a wisdom school, which may well have been in operation in the days of Jeremiah, was able to put together the definitive script of the book of Job in such a way that its riddle has, time and again, been captivating Bible readers throughout the ages. Careful reading and reflecting on this book can release a person from moralism and orthodoxism and, finally, bring the reader to the conclusion that it contains an unfathomable secret. The person of Job reveals to us that our misery is far greater than we have understood and that our salvation is far greater than our understanding and that, therefore, our thanksgiving, which God works in our hearts, also ends up to be far greater than we could ever hope to measure. Perhaps that is the riddle of the book of Job. Elihu did not solve this riddle either but Job was, nevertheless, comforted by his noble attempt.

Whoever has been captivated by the book of Job will always continue to love it. There is no book on earth to which the reader is drawn by the cords of love as this ancient poem. This simple story expresses all the secrets of God's mercy and kindness but also the destructive powers of the human heart in a language that is hidden from the 'wise and learned' but revealed to little

children. We may be sure that the secret of the book of Job, the heart of its message, may be found in God's speech about the animals. Not that this solves the riddle. This writer would not pretend that the reflections given here have brought anyone closer to unveiling the secret. Rather, we must say that any pretention of resolving the riddle of Job is but pure conceit. We must still not forget for a moment that Job did not have his equal in his blameless walk of life, his fear of the Lord and his shunning of evil.

That is why, again, it was no wonder that Elihu could not keep up with Job's advances in faith. Neither can we. A person of such inner purity far exceeds our comprehension.

Indeed, as we will show a little later on, the person of Job exceeded all the limits of our ability to characterize and even give poetic description. Job was a person just like us, a sinner who would not dream of hiding the guilt of his heart (31:33); yet he was the only person in history of whom we know that God called him blameless, a man without equal.

When the New Testament church confesses the sinlessness of Jesus Christ as his "inability to sin" it makes a very bold claim. Such a confession was made possible by the book of Job. Even if we approach the Bible with skepticism, the book of Job can still convince us, all by itself, of the truth of Scripture. It is surprising that the Jewish tradition which has made quasi-saints of many Old Testament characters like Abraham, David, Solomon or Esther, has overlooked Job. We too, might perhaps compare some of our contemporaries with Biblical characters like David, Moses or John but no one uses a comparison with Job unless it is as a caricature portraying his 'poverty' or 'patience' of Job, thereby missing the real Job altogether. Probably only Jesus fully understood Job.

Elihu should not be held responsible for his inability to fathom Job. Rather, his failed attempt to do right by Job and the confusion which characterized his speeches may argue in his favour. When he started to correct Job he came dangerously close to the position of Eliphaz (33:13), yet Job understood him. Elihu's words did not hurt him. He was well acquainted with this young man. The author who portrayed the character of Elihu and knew him from tradition, must have needed a lot of courage to give us the following presentation of the man. Elihu arrived at his goal through failure. Yet, while his failure was worse than that of the friends, this very failure also led to his success.

Elihu began to speak of God's revelation through dreams and illness and he spoke as one who had only elementary knowledge of God's revelation. He spoke of the Saviour and of salvation. He appeared to assume that God's revelation as it was known could only be expanded from personal experience. Yet this did not bring him to the conclusion that such a development

of revelation was appearing right before his very eyes through Job's suffering and illness. Nor was he aware of the implications it had for him, for Job and for many others, indeed, ultimately for the whole human race. Job did not know it either. We may even assume that, as a rule with few exceptions, those who witness to God's revelation often do not themselves have any idea that they are making history. We may think of the authors of the Psalms, Proverbs, the prophets, the Gospel writers and authors of the New Testament letters. Jesus Christ recognized the significance of his own role fully, but very few witnesses to and proclaimers of the Gospel shared this awareness.

Elihu ended his first speech with a moving appeal,

“Speak up, for I want you to be cleared” (33:32).

But Job did not feel the need to answer. He recognized the loyalty and need of his pupil and was encouraged by it even when he did not yet see a way out of his dilemma.

In his second speech, Elihu turned against the three friends. He did it with care and courtesy and even somewhat identified with them (34:7ff.), showing thereby that he wanted to agree with them up to a point. He followed this with a confession of the righteousness of God which showed his orthodoxy rather than orthodoxism. Job may well have consented to much of what he said in this section. Elihu did seem to lose his way as he pursued his subject. He got stuck; we might even say that he was confused. His speech about the righteousness of God, came dangerously close to portraying an arbitrary God. That certainly had not been Elihu's intent. He wanted to speak to find relief for his soul,

“For I am full of words,

and the spirit within me compels me;”(32:18)

This was quite evident in his second speech which was longwinded and much less polished (chapter 34). More than he intended, he came dangerously close to the position of his three friends; yet obviously, there was a noticeable difference.

In his third speech Elihu seemed to have noticed his mistake and tried to make a correction. With surprise we see how closely Elihu approached the argument of Eliphaz (compare chapters 35 and 22); yet, there was an element in his argumentation which, even though he could not find a solution, seemed to move him in the direction of the truth. He couldn't get over the boldness of Job's position over against the Lord and did not notice that it was exactly in this area that he got stuck. Perhaps, Elihu was very upset over his inability to arrive at the conclusion for which he had aimed.

Elihu's fourth speech presented a new attempt, in which a silent admission to the failure

of his previous speeches was acknowledged. His request to "bear with me a little longer" in 36:2 suggested this failure. Elihu appeared to be trying to encourage himself to continue speaking (36:3ff.).

There was something touching in the repeated failure of Elihu's attempts to make his point. It reminds us of a courageous mountain climber who, though slipping and falling, keeps on trying just the same. Failing and back sliding is an aspect of the Christian life which we should not deny; Elihu provided instruction for us in this area. K. Jaspers understood this moment of 'failure' very well but he dealt with it in the context of unbelief and thus deprived it of any role towards a triumph of faith, also an aspect of the Christian life.

Thus Elihu demonstrated the fruitlessness of the whole discussion. In Job's verbal struggle with his friends we find an aspect which typifies human history as well as salvation history. The religious struggle illustrated in the book of Job has existed since the Fall into sin and will continue to exist until Jesus returns. Therefore this story continues to provide us with instructions regarding the nature of this struggle. Because of its integrity as a whole, the book of Job has given us an excellent summary of the full revelation of God, a trait it shares with other Bible books.

Again, even the fourth speech showed Elihu's weakness which was due in part to his being bounded by his own time as well as his myopic views. But, unlike the three friends, Elihu was not tenaciously holding on to his time-bound and limited views. His struggle against his own limitation makes that clear. Elihu did not cover up his weaknesses and shortcomings in the way of the friends.

The idea of testing through affliction, appeared only briefly in Elihu's speech. In 36:8ff. he hinted at God's testing of Job but the thought was not developed any further. Critics who overestimate the character of Elihu and thus misjudge his importance, like to draw our attention to the fact that this young man, in contrast to the three other friends, knew of trials that led to repentance. But this would make Elihu the bearer of the solution to the riddle of Job. If we read chapter 36 very carefully we find little evidence of Elihu having such knowledge. If we were to find a trace it would be hidden among other ideas and play an unimportant role. The significance of Elihu was not in his preaching, as if that brought a new element into the discussion, namely, that Job's misfortune was meant not to punish but to test him. Elihu did allude to it but only faintly. The significance of Elihu can be found in his courage to start over again, every time anew, even when he had failed.

Besides his failures there were surprising successes in the person and role of Elihu. This

aspect was almost completely missing in the three friends. While they held tenaciously to their compromised wisdom, he repeatedly showed a willingness to correct himself, to drop certain conclusions when they proved unworkable. In this way he continued to walk in a renewal of life.

He was also rewarded for this willingness to change his mind, for it led to a change in attitude which not even Job appeared to have expected. Elihu no longer spoke of Job's arrogance nor did he harp on his troubles as a punishment or purifying element. He simply began to tell of the great deeds of God, just as Job had done, albeit with less determination (see chapter 26). Job must have listened to his young friend with growing admiration. Even though Elihu was not very successful in his debate and also failed in his last attempt, he began to sing a song about the omnipotence of God. As he was speaking a storm began to gather, the very storm from which the Lord would address Job.

Elihu did not solve the problem but, even as he was failing in his final attempt, he began, like a faithful child of God, to praise the greatness of the Lord. He subjected himself to the approach of the Lord in the storm and thereby became a herald of Jahweh. In spite of his own insignificance, his role provided the transition by announcing the revelation and miraculous appearance of the Almighty.

6. Job

When we presume to devote a separate discussion to the person of Job, we must emphasize again that we are not writing a 'psychology of Job', not even in outline.

Some thirty-six centuries ago, there lived a man by the name of Job. He did not have his peer in irreproachable righteousness, fearing the Lord and shunning all evil. We must remind ourselves of this again and again because there is nothing that we forget as easily when we read the book of Job. This verdict of God on Job made him unique in history, a marvel in the eyes of his contemporaries and a riddle that continues to captivate later generations.

This riddle has not yet been resolved and probably cannot be resolved.

Even for the wisdom school, which may have operated in the days of Jeremiah, the story of Job remained a tough nut to crack.

The members of that community must have studied and discussed this tradition and, together, through close co-operation, they wrote this book even though they did not finish it. The context within which they worked is not known to us in detail and we may be in danger of setting the parameters too widely. It is unlikely that the writers used only the written tradition as it was available to them. On the other hand, the claim that the authors used every opportunity to add their own views to the text is even less likely. If we may speak of a certain freedom of composition then it is to be understood that the authors were able to achieve a high degree of spiritual unity and consensus with what had been handed down to them. Then, although we must not dismiss the option that the work of those authors was primarily one of translation, we must be ready to look at other positions as well.

The book of Job was unfinished. Earlier versions contained a rather glaring omission, which was the Elihu episode. Later, possibly decades later, another member of this school, probably from a younger generation but sharing fully in the spiritual direction of the school, inserted the marvelous and indispensable, if not completely consistent, episode of Elihu. This gave the book its ultimate unity. Although we may notice that this younger author describes the problems of his own generation regarding its intergenerational relationships, we need not therefore conclude that his material was not also part of the tradition. Elihu must have been known to the older composers of the book, as a character in the history of Job, but they probably did not know what to do with him. They recognized too well that his participation did not provide the necessary solution to the puzzle either. So it was left to the younger author to realize that this shortcoming did not take away from the significance of Elihu's participation but, rather,

confirmed it. He understood that Elihu succeeded via the road of failure and was, in addition, the herald of God Himself when He 'interrupted the show' with His appearance in the storm. But, in the drama of Job, the Lord was not one of the players but the very One who, as the Exalted One, far transcended the drama while, at the same time, entering it as the Compassionate One. St. Paul compared the life of the Christian to the running of a race. We know from antiquity that the race was seen as a sacred 'show'. This is also the sense in which we may call the drama of Job a 'show'.

The paradox of the story of Job is not something that is altogether unacceptable for us. Rather, as a riddle it is not altogether alien. Because we cannot find the ultimate clue, earlier clues become doubtful too. But the book of Job witnesses both to a wisdom which *cannot* and one which *can* be found (see chapter 28). The two are inseparable and we may not exclude the possibility that at the time when the book was composed, the wisdom which could be found and the wisdom which could not be found were more clearly distinguished from one another than in the days of Job's life. Job himself clearly declared the unworthiness of the 'wisdom' of the three friends. Job also repeatedly claimed the wisdom of taking shelter with God. That was the kind of wisdom on which he based his requests for the justification which he knew had been unfairly denied him. But Job did not appear to have known that the evil one, the bold gambler, digging only a deeper grave for himself with each apparent success, was working in the background of this whole drama. Nor did he know of God's agreement to give the evil one this opportunity. Knowledge of that would not have eased his troubles. Why should the evil one have been given this opportunity? There is no answer possible to this question.

It is appealing to think that each of the figures in the book of Job, at least those who had a speaking part, that is Job, Elihu and the three friends, represented a type of religious conflict. In this connection one might ask whether indeed all five types made an attempt of giving account of their religious position. In this book we have not attempted to test this hypothesis but it does, at first glance, appear to be compatible with our position about the historicity of the players.

Elihu had come closest to Job. He recognized the unfair attitudes of the friends but his condemnation of their position remained a formal one. Their mistake had been one of not replying to Job's justification of himself while nonetheless declaring him guilty. Not that Job was innocent but, rather, his accusers fell short of their obligations. Elihu, too, had his objections to Job's position. So he took his turn at this task yet failed in accomplishing it. He did not succeed in giving the friends the answer they needed; in fact, he too often ended up agreeing with them. Nor did he point out clearly where Job had been mistaken. The discourses of Elihu, who knew

Job well and was spiritually akin to him, only moved from one failure to the next. Only towards the end as he abandoned his original intention and began to speak of the greatness of God revealed in the impending storm, did he make a constructive contribution. Elihu did not solve the riddle either.

When disaster struck Job, he was probably about 75 years old. He was still in the prime of life, like Jacob at that age. He had married children. His sons were living in their own homes while his daughters were unmarried and were occasionally invited to a party by their brothers. In chapter 31 we read about Job's life and chapter 29:1-6 reveals something of how he lived with God and his family. The rest of chapter 29 portrayed the vigorous life style of an upright and honest man. His was not a superficial moralistic righteousness, polished only for good appearance.

Jesus characterized moralists as white-washed sepulchres, filled with the bones of the dead, and everything unclean (Mt. 23:27). We might compare that text to Luke 11:40, "You foolish people, did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?"

The most astonishing aspect of Job's integrity was that his inner and his outer life were not in contradiction. Eliphaz assumed, without a doubt, that for most the inner life was a rather messy affair; this led him to make the vicious accusations in chapter 22. He appeared to be saying, that this was something we just didn't talk about although we, of course, knew this about one another. But Job was not party to such charades and was deeply offended by the condescending generalizations of Eliphaz.

It also appears that Job, at least at that time, assumed that outward righteousness had to be based on inward holiness. In the heat of the crisis he discovered otherwise. That was a terrible shock for Job and caused the breakup of his friendships. Only much later did Job speak about inner purity (33:1). His friends did not wish to believe him. When Job continued to ask them for their friendship (19:21) in spite of his discovery of their inner corruption, they hardened themselves even more in opposing him.

No doubt, we can hardly believe, comprehend or even imagine that there once was an ordinary person, someone just like you and me, who even in his innermost thoughts was pure and irreproachably upright, fearing God and shunning all evil. The friends sneered at the idea as an utter impossibility and they thought, that among friends, they should have been able to say so. Job despised the congeniality which, in the intimacy of friendship, took for granted that all righteousness was really a facade. In response, Job had some terrible words for his friends (16:1-5). He taunted and derided their position with satire, all the while not abandoning his love for

them and still longing for their fellowship as friends. He clung to his claims of innocence because he accepted that fact, yet recognized that God had removed from him his right to receive justice.

In a purity of life which we find hard to imagine, Job confirmed the depths of human misery. It never crossed his mind to cover up his transgressions as Adam had done. This may have led Elihu to conclude that Job knew the impurity of his inner life, but in this he was mistaken. There were no filthy thoughts in Job's heart. We can hardly imagine that and certainly, modern studies of human character accept the corruption of the inner self as natural.

There was one person who knew Job well, better even than Elihu, namely, his wife. Yet even she did not fully know him. She had been united with him in a lengthy marriage, one in flesh and one in life. Her love for him must have been close to adoration but, with a husband like Job, she would not have had the opportunity to really 'worship' him. But she was part of his life and he of hers. St. Paul said, in 1 Cor. 7:4, "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife."

The word 'body' in this context, certainly did not refer to one 'part' of our dual human nature. Here the body referred to the whole person, the total being, just as when Jesus said, "This is my body", he meant his whole self.

Yet bodiliness refers to our humanity only in a certain way, primarily as it pertains to our task in the flesh. People are bodies and souls but their task in the flesh is a limited one and will, eventually, come to an end. Marriage is a prime example of a task of life in the flesh. This is clear from Paul's warnings against prostitution (a warning the Corinthians needed badly) in 1 Cor. 6:18, "All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body."

The first part of this text is certainly not to be interpreted as meaning that all other sins do not touch our bodily nature. They certainly do but they are not limited to it. All other sins go beyond our bodily existence but prostitution, like an enemy, turns against our bodily nature and the specific task of the flesh which, incidentally, like all assignments from God, is also a spiritual task. Marriage, too, is a spiritual task as well as one of the flesh and restricted to the time of the flesh. It is the only assignment which, according to the Scriptures, will be done away with after death and the judgement.

The knowledge of faith available to the people of Job's time, had put a strong accent on the task of the flesh and its spiritual character. This was but one of the limitations surpassed by Job in his struggle when he said,

“Yet without my flesh I shall see God” (19:26 NASB)⁸⁴

Job could not have had a casual attitude toward sex which was so common among the Israelites, their neighbours as well as in ancient Greece, particularly Corinth. He had said,

“I made a covenant with my eyes
not to look lustfully at a girl” (31:1).

He dared to say this in an environment which simply had no room for such an attitude. From this we gain an insight into the strength and purity of his marriage. We may assume that his wife shared in that purity. She must have looked up to her husband. No other woman in the Bible could have had more reason to admire her spouse. Not Abigail as David’s wife, nor Hannah in her marriage with Elkanah. We will not even talk of Solomon’s wives. We must not be crude in our judgement but we may assume that Job’s wife was a highly privileged person; and, as Job’s spouse she herself must have been an exceptional person.

She could not face his suffering; to her it seemed like an agonizingly slow death. She too had lost her home, her property and all her children. However when she saw her husband’s body slowly rotting away, she had had enough and exclaimed,

“Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” (2:9)

Job’s wife as well as Job, must have known that justification of the righteous was a gift of God’s grace. But he may have wanted to say that since he was now dying why should he poison his last hours thinking about a God who, even though he may have granted him righteousness, took away the glory of a real and present justification for, even before him, his wife had recognized the injustice.

It was not until later (10:20ff.) that Job began to sense what his wife had hinted at here. Then his expressions sounded more like the words of his wife,

“Are not my few days almost over?
Turn away from me so I can have a
moment’s joy
before I go to the place of no return,” (10:20,21a).

According to verse 18, these words were addressed to God.

Job had corrected his wife in a friendly manner.

After a time his three friends visited him. As he poured out his heart to them he showed a complete trust in them. He had no reason to suspect them nor was that in his character. When they saw him at a distance they did not recognize him. They raised their voices and wept. They

⁸⁴ See also footnote in the NIV

tore their clothes and poured dust on their heads (2:12). Then they sat with him, in silence, for seven days and seven nights. This was something completely beyond our experience.

Job must have accepted it as a spontaneous indication of support and friendship and it probably was meant that way by the friends. It must have been devastating for Job to discover that his friends did not understand him at all and that their hearts were not really open to him. Instead they hardened themselves against him from the very beginning. They were unwilling to accept Job's justification of himself expressed in his imprecatory song (chapter 3).

Job poured out his heart in this song and as we read on we find that he remained true to this complaint to the very end. In chapters 30 and 31 his assertions were less vehement, calmer and more resigned than in chapter 3 but the content had not changed. Some interpreters might appeal to 42:6 and say that Job 'repented' but it is not that simple. Job did not repent of anything for he would then also have repented of the great discoveries made in his struggle for justification; they were inseparably united with his complaint. Job realized that he had entered a new era of understanding and that he had to reject insights that belonged to a previous period.

John 3 called such a transition 'being born again'. This is the only way that we can make sense of the person of Job who was both a plaintive, blaming God, and at the same time, one who spoke well of God.

In our attempt to understand the imprecatory song, we meet many obstacles of which only a few can be removed. When we assume that numerous centuries separated the events of Job's life from the final writing of the book as we know it, we must ask ourselves whether Job *did* or *did not* say it exactly the way it was written. But we can only start answering that when we have fully understood the question. And that is our problem! The traditional reading of the text tended to stifle the question and limited our understanding. The suggestion that Job could not possibly have said it in that way, sheds very little light on the issue. Why should we make such an assumption and what does it really mean?

We could only be sure of what Job actually said after we have fully examined the given method of debate and discourse in which all the participants receive a full opportunity to express themselves without interruption (the bane of our current practice). We must ask whether such a method is possible as a cultural custom or an artistic device.

When we assume stylistic editing, we should also ask about the scope and purpose of such editing. It could have been used to reveal and illumine expression of emotion, remaining true to the original events without quoting the words of the participants *vebatim*. So those who maintain that Job could not possibly have spoken in poetic form, claiming that he must have stammered

out inconsistent and nervous phrases, must examine the grounds upon which they based this certainty. Often this kind of certainty covers a multitude of arbitrary assumptions.

Even the most learned scholars know very little about the cultural environment of Job's time. We should take into consideration that, even today, at solemn feasts or parties, the spontaneous improvisation of poetry is not uncommon. So we ought not to be so firm in claiming that 'of course' Job never spoke in poetic form.

On the other hand we do know that Job and his friends spoke a language different from that in which the book was written. We assume that the tradition regarding Job was a written one, not just folklore but we can't begin to estimate what characterized the documents. It would be tempting to presume that such a written tradition was relatively modest and would have offered members of the wisdom school full opportunity to develop an epic poem. Yet we may not automatically exclude the possibility that available documents already contained a detailed and developed work of art. One might even assume, that work of the wisdom school was primarily one of translation, not so much one of development or embellishment. This whole issue needs to be reviewed faithfully and without jumping to hasty conclusions.

We are on safer ground with the following two items. Job poured out his heart to his friends but , from the start, they hardened their attitudes towards him. This ran so deep that the religious parting of the way led to an inevitable break in their relationship as friends. Even in his first answer to Eliphaz, Job observed that,

“He who withholds kindness from a friend
forsakes the fear of the Almighty.” (6:14 RSV)

In the specifics of moral relationships, the heart expresses itself as an instrument of faith and religion; accordingly, we recognize a denial of the requirements of the bond of friendship as sin.

In 19:29 Job referred to it as a crime deserving of death, one that would bring judgement,

“you should fear the sword yourselves;
for wrath will bring punishment by
the sword,”

We judge ourselves by the way we read the book of Job. It is very instructive to note that new voices are constantly raised to protect the three friends, even though, in 42:7ff., God Himself condemned them. The approval of the positions of Job's friends is often given with numerous provisos but, in the end, it still, typically, ignores the judgement of their position by Job himself. Job spoke clearly to his friends and thereby indicated the close-knit relationship between closeness to God in faith and moral obligations in friendship. The Biblical teachings on

friendship often sounds very strange in our ears.

Here, too, we must be careful not to come to hasty conclusions. We may be tempted to think that the bond between Job and his friends was very strong while his wife hardly entered the picture. But we must be sensitive to both the purity of his marriage and the strength and depth of his friendship. Through this crisis he lost his friends but kept his wife. And so, after the friends made their dejected exit, Job was not left behind as the poverty stricken loser.

After Job had called Eliphaz to his senses and thereby also addressed the other two (6:29), he turned to a complaint, which appears to be a sequel to the imprecatory prayer. Obviously, he did not regret the earlier outpouring of his heart.

Here too we face the difficult question of how we are to understand Job's weakness or possible transgression. The three friends were faced with this question and failed miserably. Elihu was faced with the same question and also failed but for a completely different reason. We may be guided by the Lord's criticism of Job; God called him an accuser of the Almighty (see 40:2) yet declared that he had spoken well of Him (42:7).

But how can we responsibly understand such a contradiction? One way which has been very popular (but totally unacceptable in my opinion) is to apply some kind of separation between theological theory and ecclesiastical confession. Such a dualism exists when an exegetical technique is applied to Scripture without any desire or effort to be subject to the teaching of the church. This becomes especially pernicious when one and the same person wishes to promote freedom to exegete a text and insist that such freedom does not contradict being a faithful member of the church. In other words, in his church life he exercises a faith which contradicts the 'faith' that guides him in his exegetical work.

A responsible and respectful approach to Scripture must begin by avoiding such a separation. We are called to a life of integrity, a unity of knowledge and faith, head and heart. This provides the only key by which we can hope to understand the book of Job.

We have noted earlier that progress in the development of Word-revelation through the life of Job meant for him a transition into a new period of faith and understanding. This does not give the whole story; there are other aspects to consider. Growing and particularly growing in faith, are complicated matters. Job grew in faith but not all at once. Sometimes he stumbled, falling back to a previous position. His growth was not quiet, steady progress. Far more often he reached in desperation for what, for all practical purposes, was unreachable. Nor was Job always as willing and conscious to make progress. We sometimes speak of the birthpangs of a new era; these terms can well be applied also to the speeches of Job. He himself experienced the

birthpangs which preceded a new age, but without the natural expectation that new life would follow. Perhaps this was the one fault in Job, that he did not want to make progress, preferring the status quo of the existing age.

That does not explain everything either. Hidden behind the struggle and suffering of Job, we can see the work of Satan. Nor would we take the easy route of assuming that, although the evil one was working toward producing evil, he nevertheless must have, inevitably, been the cause of good. We say that God allows Satan to do his work and that God can even use him as an instrument for good; but even this leaves too much that still has not been explained.

Another point of view has been expressed by those who understand the book of Job as a revelation of the reliability of salvation. This thought is very appealing. From the story of Job we see that God's work in the life of Job indicates the reliability in the acid test of Job's troubles. This view is also too narrow and leaves too many unanswered questions. The book of Job is not, in the first place, about Job. Nor is it primarily a revelation of God with Job as its means to an end. The life of Job was not insignificant, to be sure, but more important was the task assigned to him. Was it true, as we so often hear, that Job considered his personal needs above those of his task? I would challenge that notion. Which task is being referred to here, anyway, that of a witness to new revelation? Surely, Job had no idea of such a task. Could it have been the task of a minister of the Word, or perhaps the more general calling of all human beings? We may be sure of one thing, that Job was not an individualist even though the book of Job is often read with the blinders of an unspoken assumption that Job was very individualistic and that, therefore, the reader may use this work to explore the recesses of his soul. Such approaches only make the book of Job more of a closed book to us. There is no reason to believe that Elihu was any more right than the other three friends. There is much to argue against that, most of all his repeated failures. So today every reader is faced again with the question, "To what extent was Job disobedient?" Reading and re-reading the text only confirms for us that the book of Job, though testifying to divine revelation, is also thoroughly human. And it becomes clear that this book has to be read communally, with every reader contributing to its meaning; perhaps even getting drawn into it as a participant in the drama. Elihu may have said some strange things but he did become, even without being asked, a participant in this drama. We too are participants in the drama of Job. All of us are involved in some way with the history of Job and with the authors of the book. The book was entrusted to the care of the church and it is questionable whether the church has taken proper care of this book. Certain individual members of the church, and even those who do not wish to be included in its membership, have often taken a more intense interest in this story than

the church itself.

Only those who unwillingly or unwittingly have become real participants in the drama of Job (perhaps through their own suffering), will begin to understand the book. They may then express views which are considered unacceptable by the exegetical experts and that is a pity, especially for those experts. In the drama of Job, it was Satan who had to drop the role he so badly wanted to play and instead, God, who was never a player, has come to meet us. Anyone who, unwillingly or unwittingly becomes a real participant in this drama, must be prepared to become an object of scorn, especially among the religious zealots who understand next to nothing about the book of Job.

The question, "To what extent was Job disobedient?" still needs to be answered. In the attempt to answer this question our usual study aids fail us. His figure looms large and our artistic sensitivities or attempts at sympathizing with him, fail us miserably. Job was too big for his friends, too big for Elihu and he is also too big for us. Nevertheless, in his Word God asks us what we think of Job. God's question to Satan,

"Have you considered my servant Job?"(1:8)

is indirectly also directed to us. For when *we* consider God's servant Job we must find an answer that is more righteous than that of the three friends and more encompassing than the answer of Elihu. And woe to us if our answer does any injustice to God. If we ignore the issue, which so often happens, we sidestep the opportunity to make progress in knowledge and faith and, instead, we backslide. In its own way the book of Job presents the full Gospel and this book teaches us how easily we are distracted in our attention for the Gospel message. This book causes us to fall or rise. Reading the book of Job and reflecting on it means growing in righteousness or depravity. It is not only important that the book of Job opens the way for the Gospel because without this book the church could not have seriously confessed the sinlessness of Christ. Far more important is the fact that the book of Job itself is Good News. We could respond superficially and reduce Job to a liberal preacher. Even worse, we could go the way of petty religiosity in demonstrating that the book contains internal contradictions; such an approach if held consistently, would only add to our depravity. We could cripple the text by insisting that we use only current and acceptable philological principles. Or we can reduce our knowledge of the book by arbitrarily mixing and matching chapters or by ascribing part of the discourse of Job to Zophar. There are many ways of giving a false response to the question placed before us by this book. But...

The question will not go away.

To simply dismiss the imprecatory prayer as inadmissible will not do. One might assume such a position initially but, careful consideration and reflection, based on personal life experience, will soon lead to its dismissal. The reason is that the imprecatory song does not stand in isolation; it permeates the whole book. Job's shortsighted friends rejected it outright but Elihu hesitated. Elihu did not accept the attitude of the friends but neither did he know what to make of Job's song.

We know the background which Job did not know; his turmoil resulted from the evil intervention of Satan. Job did not and could not know this. The Lord rebukes the evil one for inciting Him to ruin Job (2:3), and we have trouble understanding this and thus know little more than Job himself. He knew nothing and his ignorance was exactly what he needed to fulfill his calling as witness to the furtherance of God's Word revelation (of which he was just as unaware).

In matters of faith our knowledge plays a vital role. When knowledge of faith is clouded by too great a preoccupation with our feelings, it leads not only to a regression in that knowledge but to a degeneration of our total religious life. There is precious wisdom in the teaching of the church when it poses the question, "What must you *know* to live and die in the joy of this [Christian] comfort?"⁸⁵ Proper recognition of what we *don't know* is as important as the attention we give to what we *do know*. Denial of the significance of 'not knowing' whether from scholastic or rationalistic motives, can only lead to a distorted appreciation of human nature. Job 28 speaks at length about the wisdom which cannot be found by human beings, and only briefly about the wisdom that can be uncovered and is available to us. Job knew very well that our true humanity is intimately connected with our inability to know everything. In 26:14, while finishing his comments to his friends and reaching forward to the solution that God would provide, Job spoke about the extent and depth of human not-knowing.

"These are but the outer fringes of his works;
how faint the whisper we hear of him!
Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"

When we try to summarize the highlights of Job's development in faith, we do not find sinlessness. We do find a guideline pointing toward a sinlessness which far exceeds our imagination, a guideline which prepares the way for confession. On the other hand, the words of Job contain not a trace of the unrighteousness which was ascribed to him by the three friends and, even to some extent, by Elihu. That leaves only one possibility, that through Job the Lord has fulfilled his work on behalf of mankind in such a way that His will became Job's will. At the

same time Job showed beyond a doubt that he was not sinless, not a Redeemer, nor 'one-in-a-thousand'. So, even though Job's righteousness and integrity far exceeds our understanding, God's instruction teaches us that Job was our brother, like us in all things including sinfulness and shortcomings.

Thus we find Job's sinfulness where we don't expect to find it; and his righteousness is actually found where many suspect him of transgression.

The imprecatory prayer was a much holier song than is often presumed and our first reaction might be like that of Bildad; but that would be utterly wrong. The friends who had sincerely and generously consoled and comforted Job, opposed him immediately after this imprecatory song. Hereby they revealed their own spiritual poverty without recognizing this themselves. They stuck to their own unholy position and thereby increased the suffering of Job dreadfully. With the increasing intensity of his suffering, the thought of dying was made unbearable because Job experienced it as a denial of his rights; yet through it all, he discovered the way of progress in God's self-revelation, even in the midst of a world sinking away into apostasy.

From Job's first answer to Eliphaz it was clear that he considered his calamity worse than impending death. He was dying slowly and the fact that he had to fulfill this task in the flesh was beyond his knowledge of faith. Yet that was how it had to be. Job had to suffer through experiences which far exceeded his strength and knowledge of faith. That is the route by which the history of revelation often progresses; this time it made a big step forward through the suffering and reflection of the man Job who was not even an Israelite. The step was so big that we, even now, are often amazed by the tone of the book as it reminds us of the Gospel in the New Testament. The entire teaching of the Scriptures can be found in this one book. Even before disaster struck him, Job must have known about a redeemer, a 'one-in-a-thousand' of whom Elihu spoke. He also knew that his contemporaries, even Elihu, had a more limited and less mature knowledge of faith than he had himself; this made his fate even more confusing. But when this confusion led to enmity on the part of the friends, Job made no excuses for them. They brought judgement upon themselves.

We learn something else here. Even Job with his broader and deeper awareness of faith, could not cope with the trouble that overtook him. He was overwhelmed by a superhuman struggle, ultimately a struggle with God. It was exactly in the dispute with his friends who had so bitterly disappointed him and who had shown no mercy in abusing a dying man, that Job

⁸⁵ The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1, Question 2

reached marvelous heights of faith, a vision which for centuries has captivated and encouraged the church and its members.

He reached these heights through a certain rhythm, from being dog-tired to renewed energy and back into the depths of exhaustion again. After the first attainment in chapter 6 we find a return to the complaints in chapter 7. After the bitterly energetic response in chapter 9 we read the tired complaint of chapter 10. This was no natural rhythm but the heartbeat of eternal life in a person who had been beaten down and yet had received grace.

At first we do not see where it was all going to end and only in chapter 13, where Job accused his friends of speaking deceitfully as unrighteous advocates on God's behalf (13:7,8) do we sense something of the immense energy at work in the person of Job. It was a power that worked wonders using a poor remnant of a human being who was dying and whose flesh was rotting away. Sure, it was Job working but also something more that transcended him, "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (13:15).

In the 14th chapter we find again a return to complaining and a tired sighing that accompanied his misery. Yet, when he wrestled again with Eliphaz in chapter 16, his unimaginable strength of faith returned, rising to unprecedented heights when he said,

“...my witness is in heaven;
my advocate is on high.
[My friends treat me with scorn]⁸⁶
as my eyes pour out tears to God;” (vs 19, 20)
“that he would maintain the right of a man with God...” (vs 21 RSV).

Again, this most remarkable expression of faith and vision was followed by depression and a return to complaining in chapter 17. But when he was hurt to the depth of his soul by the second speech of Bildad, he made the beautiful confession (which can only be understood in the context of the whole book),

“I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand
upon the earth” (19:25).

Then he confessed what, one must suppose, no other Old Testament person could have understood,

“And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet [apart from] my flesh I will see God; (19:26).⁸⁷

This time Job did not sink back into despair. He ended his second answer to Bildad with a sharp warning: those who betrayed their duty as a friend will “know that there is judgement” (vs 29).

After the inappropriate and high-strung speech of Zophar in chapter 20, Job seemed to be separating himself more and more from his friends. There was a certain coolness in his words as he pointed out that their iron rule that the godless inevitably fall into trouble, had many exceptions. In chapter 23 he seemed to talk to himself more than to the friends who were no longer his friends and continued this trend in the following chapters. Only with the third response to Bildad did he address them and then only briefly. But he continued on a different tack, one which would later be followed up on by the instruction of the Lord Himself.

When the friends no longer wished to continue the discussions, Job continued alone. That is to say that he attempted to finish by himself the task which they had embarked on together. This meant, as we have discussed earlier, that his apparent monologues served to help the friends to resume the part they played in the task and which they had abandoned. Job spoke more calmly now about the godless who were truly without hope. He gladly agreed with them on that point even though this was not the subject under discussion. He spoke of unaccessible wisdom and drew a clear boundary between himself and the false faith of his friends.

Job did not gloat over them but reached out with a helping hand. He spoke at length and we do not know whether the friend were slowly settling back to listen. In any case their position remained two-faced. They neither left nor did they break the silence. They had completely forgotten that wisdom belonged to God. It appears that the entire wisdom tradition as it was found outside Israel (and the book of Job may well reflect, at least partially, that tradition), can be faulted exactly on this issue. The hellenic wisdom also failed here. According to the ancient teachings, wisdom assured that all that existed was fully comprehensible. Job rejected this and such a rejection is echoed by all the Old Testament wisdom literature, in fact the whole Bible. St. Paul too spoke of it at the end of the letter to the Romans where he praised “the only wise God”.

Indeed, this God gives wisdom to humans; but it is not ultimate or complete wisdom. In chapter 28 Job pursued the ideas which he had already touche on in chapter 26,

“How faint the whisper we hear of him!
Who then can understand the
Thunder of his power?” (26:14b).

⁸⁶ See NIV footnote to vs 20

⁸⁷ See NIV footnote for italics

The confession of our ultimate not-knowing was not a somber pessimism, as is often assumed, but rather the opposite. This confession was the basis of pure joy. This joy was portrayed in different words when Job had taken the big step and confessed that the faith of his earlier days, even though pure and intimate, had still been remarkably vague,

“My ears had heard of you,
but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5).

This deeper insight went hand in hand with the full acknowledgement of all the secrets of God. We must not forget that the Bible never favours seeing over hearing; obedience is, first of all, a response to words not to what is seen. Only in the sacraments (of baptism and communion) is God’s promise of faith made visible. That is why we can make a comparison between the strengthening of Job’s faith by ‘seeing’ with the strength we gain from partaking in the Lord’s Supper. (This is not the place to discuss ancient and modern views regarding the importance of the sense of sight to human beings: cf. Plato, Augustine, Heidegger, et al.)

The contrast between God-fearing wisdom and counterfeit arrogance was a much-loved theme in the ancient wisdom schools of Israel, and received special attention in one of the latest works, the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 discusses the contrast between arrogant wisdom which presumes to understand everything and God-fearing wisdom which maintains that God keeps secrets to Himself. This book was probably written in the Hellenistic period, several centuries after the book of Job. The “Wisdom which cannot be found” can probably be identified with the Hellenistic concept of wisdom which became known in Israel during the first expansionist period. Hellenistic thought was characteristically motivated by passionate faith in the perspicuity of all that exists. The Book of Ecclesiastes, however, in 7:24, teaches,

“That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?” (NRSV).

This same passage mentions the “one...man among a thousand” (see 7:28), an expression also found in the speech of Elihu, in which we detect a vague Messianic reference. The reference, in verse 28, to the wise woman which could not be found must, in its context, be understood as having an allegorical meaning. The Bible is extremely careful with allegory and nearly all attempts at allegorical exegesis result in failure. There are very few occasions when we are forced to resort to it and then it is permissible and acceptable. When the Preacher proclaims a wisdom which cannot be found and then, in the next breath, refers to a wise woman who cannot be found, the explanation, in my opinion, is as clear as day. The woman “who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains” (vs26) must be understood as a poetic indication of

the arrogant Hellenic ideal of wisdom which had also been responsible for many casualties among the Israelites.

When we compare the details of Ecclesiastes with the book of Job it is tempting to suppose that relatively 'modern' wisdom has been inserted into the text. The authors of the book of Job, presumably, used insight from their own day and age in writing up the story of Job.

This conclusion would be premature.

We may suppose that the authors of the book of Job, as they took up the task of 'polishing' the work, used expressions which Job could never have made; (it is an assumption that is not necessarily true) but even then we could accept an inner connection between an 'archaic' portrayal of the Job figure and a more 'modernized' description. The Hellenistic ideal of wisdom was not limited to the time period of Hellenism but has its roots in far older periods of time. The wisdom literature from outside Israel has similar traits.

That is why it is both unnecessary and incorrect as a working hypothesis to make a sharp distinction between an 'archaic' Job and a 'modern' wisdom school. Both deal with the same subject. From our own experience we know that very old traditions and figures can have a surprisingly modern impact on us and we can safely surmise that, here too, it must be so. The teaching regarding the perspicuity of being is almost as old as humanity itself and opposition to it is just as old. It is quite possible that wisdom teachers such as those from the time of Jeremiah, made some surprising discoveries in old written traditions. They may have discovered that a problem that had only recently become a live issue for them had also been dealt with by someone who lived shortly after Abraham's days. (Such a consideration could support speculation that the book of Job was compiled even later than is presently assumed). Accordingly, these later wisdom teachers would have realized the very old age of whatever happened to be a new problem to them and also how current the most ancient questions proved to be.

In Job's last speech we sense a degree of decline in his words about his earlier prosperity and his present suffering. But this relapse differed from the previous ones and he concluded with a powerful witness of his innocence, presenting a detailed description of his conviction and the decisions based on it.

"The words of Job are ended" (31:40b).

He remained faithful to his position and opened grand vistas but did not find the final solution to his problem. Yet in the course of his arguments he said all that was necessary and everything needed to enter into a new era of faith. Whatever was developed in chapters 38 through 40 as God's own instructions, was already present in embryo form in chapter 26.

But now “the words of Job are ended” and still he had no idea of how to go on from there. His young friends Elihu tried to give a solution but failed. In spite of himself he did provide the transition to God’s speaking in the storm; and the instruction from God can be seen to contain elements that we had found already in chapters 26 and 28. Job knew more than he thought he knew. But this does not release us from the responsibility of dealing separately with the most significant element in the book of Job: God’s teaching about the animals!

7. The Animals

Even before 1930, I heard a defence of the thesis that the key to understanding the book of Job was to be found in the chapters concerning the animals. This position was not new at the time and had apparently been defended from time to time, if only as an incidental discovery, over the centuries. But it was never widely accepted; perhaps that was too much to expect. The position which saw Elihu as the one who gave the solution, especially through what he said in passing about suffering as a testing, was more widely known. But Elihu did not express himself very clearly on this point and he certainly did not give it his undivided attention. Even more important is the consideration that the message of the book of Job would be a poor one if it did not contain more than teaching of the “benefits of tribulation”.

We have already remarked in the chapter featuring Elihu that this episode has given scholars so much trouble; many are even ready to delete it from the book as a later addition to the text. Such tampering with the text is based on nothing more than unjustifiable assumptions that the book of Job was written by one person and, unfortunately, most philological experts have not seen beyond that assumption. A recognition of the likelihood of multiple authorship of this book allows for a much better explanation of Elihu’s contribution. To think that acceptance of multiple authorship means selling out to modern philological discoveries and rejection of the authority of Scripture, is unworthy of sound scholarship. It is all the more foolish because proponents of such discoveries often themselves did not know what to do with their conclusions and instead directed their efforts to a senseless unravelling of a tale. They may use fancy methods like the ‘theological critical’ approach in an attempt to repair what liberal exegetical techniques have destroyed. But anyone who regards such an attempt as more an illusion than evidence of a more sober and sensible approach, will find neither the unravelling nor the repair work afterwards acceptable, however carefully the position may be referred to as ‘uncritical obsession’.

Those who make such use of terminology may expect to hear similar aspersion cast on them.

The Elihu episode has been a priceless and indispensable part of the book of Job. It has contributed to its unity but does not provide the key to understanding this book. On the contrary, the failure of Elihu's several attempts to admonish Job points in the opposite direction.

The key is to be found in God's instruction regarding the animals.

The very fact that in the dramatic portrayal of the story of Job, God Himself appeared as though He were one of the participants while at the same time remaining far exalted above the drama, contributes to the conclusion that the authors intended His contribution to contain the key.

Additional proof of this is the fact that God in answering Job also told *us* that we should not forget that He remained the Exalted One. We find a similar account in the Genesis account of the struggle of Jacob with God. Jacob wrestled with the 'Angel of the Lord' until daybreak and received both a damaged hip and a new name, Israel. But when Jacob asked after his name he said'

"Why do you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:29)

This same 'Angel of the Lord' when asked his name by Manoah, the father of Samson, responded, saying,

"Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful" (Judges 13:17-NRSV).

We note the same element in the appearance of God in the drama of Job. He became one of the participants yet remained the Exalted One, lofty in His Majesty.

The solution lies in God's instruction regarding the animals; we are certain of this even if we cannot demonstrate it from the contents of these divine instructions. We know it simply because there is no other option. The friends have failed, Elihu also failed and Job himself, even with his unforgettable peaks of insight did not find a solution. There remains but one possibility: the solution has to be found in chapters 38-41.

So far we have not yet said much to clear up these most mysterious chapters of the book of Job. Nor will it be easy to do so. We can point to the arrangements of the chapter in that the Lord did not immediately speak about the animals but began by calling Job to account for His creative work. Only when this subject has been exhausted do we find the questions about the life of the animals! Lion, raven, mountain goat, wild donkey, wild ox, ostrich, horse, hawk and eagle. Job's first answer was most unsatisfactory; he disappointed God Who, in turn, proceeded to speak passionately of the large, even then extinct animals, portraying them with ironic use of mythical enhancement. Only then did Job take the big step, which every believer must ultimately

make, to enter the new space in which the Spirit operates.

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”(38:4).

We sometimes speak of “Divine humour”, it should be used with care since one can easily be mistaken about it. But here it is impossible to be mistaken. There is no line in the entire Bible in which the humour of God sparkles with as much divine light as here. As we read the book of Job (refusing to bow to any exegetical technique) we too, as the church, are drawn into this drama. And in this way God directs these wonderful words to us,

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”

It is the depth of this divine humour which can grip us. Through it God approaches His creatures with all his exalted majesty and yet also with intimate tenderness. Here we find the unity of both Law and Gospel as God bends down to us with a smile and addresses us with this marvelous question out of the middle of a storm.

God set the foundations of the earth through His will and established boundaries and limitations for all his creatures. It is a theme, well-known in the wisdom literature of the Israelites. Again we should be aware of possibility that this theme was discussed in detail long before the wisdom schools arose in Israel. In the book of Job this theme, which covers nearly the whole chapter 38, served as an introduction to God’s speaking about the animals.

God began by referring to animals still in existence today. Only one among them, the horse, has been serving humans and is being trained and cultivated for human use. But even this animal illustrates the mystery hidden in the world of the animals. Job knew that God created human beings and that He also created animals. Did he really want to know who God is? This is the God who created animals and gave them their proper domain as playground. That is to say, they received their own space and even their own freedom. Human thought can never comprehend or penetrate the domain of the animals not even when they have subjected and domesticated them. To discover how completely impenetrable and mysterious the animal kingdom is, we need only reflect on one animal that has been quite close to human beings, namely the horse. The horse has been trainable even for the purpose of war. But, even this animal which has allowed itself to be tamed and trained, remains completely beyond our understanding. We cannot enter the world of animals, not even when we subdue them to our will. But the majority of animals cannot be subjected to our will at all. Most have been living in wild freedom and have retained the peculiar dignity of animals.

There have always been humans who have attempted to get at the secrets of animal life through fantasy. In such stories, humans might act as domesticated animals to a horse, or

animals might become rulers in cultural or political spheres or, alternately humans might be overcome and destroyed by ambitious termites.⁸⁸ But these stories only restate the question and do not provide the solution nor penetrate the mysteriousness of the animal kingdom.

Both wild and domesticated animals live their own lives in their domains which remain, for people, impenetrable. For those humans who consider themselves the most important of creatures, the instruction to look to the animals world for understanding God, is utterly humiliating. Animals who are, after all, our fellow creatures, by their own incomprehensibility, point to the incomprehensibility of God. Those who believe in the perspicuity of being only need to look at the animals to see how incredibly foolish that belief is. God has made all these animals and for no other reason than that it was his good pleasure to do so; for God always does what pleases him. God created the animals because he took delight in doing so.

The animals existed before any people lived on the earth. Their generations are much older than human generations. Some day the animals may disappear (as many have already done) but we know little about that. One wonders whether a world without animals would still be a habitable world. Animals are our companions, at times our enemies and occasionally our servants; in all that, their lives existence remain a complete mystery to us.

We know that God must have had fun creating the animals. He enjoyed himself and took pleasure in the works of his hands. From this we can learn that in spite of our high position in the creation we humans are still only fellow creatures and relative latecomers at that. We have also been deprived of much of the power that animals have. Yet many animals lack 'wisdom' and behave in amusingly stupid fashion even within the framework of animal behaviour. The ostrich forgets her eggs in the sand, because God denied her wisdom (39:17). The animal world has been almost completely removed from human control. It is true that animals remain bound by instinctive behaviour and that they do not possess the equivalent of human freedom. Yet they do have their specific animal-freedom, their own domain and terrain in which they move at will and they experience their own joy.

The animal world also does not know, nor is it responsible for, sin. An intense innocence characterizes the life of the animals; they have never fallen into sin and, indeed, cannot do so. They have never grieved their creator as humans continue to do with their transgressions. Those who want to know who God is do well to look to the animals rather than to the human race!

Animals have no desire to be more than animals. They live and let live and do so

⁸⁸ E.g see Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; George Orwell's *Animal Farm*; or modern day fantasy or horror movies.

intensely. Just as Adam had to observe the animals, so Job was invited to observe them and from that discover who God was. That would have cured his tendency to find fault with God. He would have learned of the wonderful bond between human beings and animals which continued unabated in spite of the impenetrable boundary set between their respective lives and existence. Job, as a shepherd king, would have known something of that bond already. When he was made to recognize that the same God who made him also created the animals, he would have forgotten his own self-importance and remembered the loss of ruling power over the animals.

God reminded Job of the time when there were animals on the earth but no people. Then too the earth was beautiful. All that God created was beautiful in its time. Later humans came on earth and were granted great powers as a special gift from the almighty God who already was pleased with a world when only animals existed. Humans are not nearly as important as they have assumed since the fall.

Job must have understood something of this teaching; perhaps even much of it. But he was strangely careful when he said no more than,

“I put my hand over my mouth” (40:4).

This may have been a touch of stubbornness or even an inability to completely absorb the new teaching.

And so, he showed his own short coming and thereby created a predicament for God.

There are many incomprehensible accounts in the Bible. We read in the book of Job that God did not *need* human beings -- this can be found in the third speech of Eliphaz. When we read the beginning of the book of Job we might get the impression that God *needed* Job to accomplish His goals. This is again one of the things that will remain a mystery to us. When we make a confession, albeit with a different tone of voice from Eliphaz', that God does not need us, we are correct, yet there is a way at which this is not completely true. When God raises those who were dead to new life it is completely His work. But then those persons will go to work for God, be it with fear and trembling. The Scriptures call the wonderful work of God done through these people amazingly as helping the Lord.

Job fell short in this task. He did not come forward to help the Lord. In the song of Deborah we read that God's call meant exactly that: those who were called had to come to help the Lord and those who refused were threatened with a heavy curse (c.f. Judges 5:23).

It has been suggested that the words, “I put my hand over my mouth” may be taken as the key to the meaning of the book. This is one of the worst mistakes ever made by applying exegetical techniques which are responsible for many such errors. A learned professor may be an

expert in the history and culture of the ancient middle east and provide valuable insight for understanding a book of the Bible, yet he may completely miss the religious significance of that book.

“I put my hand over my mouth” is definitely not the key to the book of Job.

These words revealed a serious shortcoming in Job; it may have been the only place where we truly see Job fail. He refused to help the Lord. This shows that Job was not perfect; he was only a sinner like all other sinners and he, like the others, could not possess the righteousness of Christ except through grace.

We notice God’s distress about Job’s dodging the question and his avoidance was a form of refusal. From this distress the mighty God spoke to a diminished Job the wonderful words about large animals, extinct animals the memory of which provided writers of myths the material for constructing false gods.

It is sometimes claimed that a baptized child who rejects his baptism drives God to distraction. Such a comment is not without danger but is closer to the truth than a systematic and carefully balanced theory about the attributes of God. God had counted on Job. He knew that His work in Job could not remain without fruits. And just as God is pleased when fruits come, he is also disappointed and concerned when it fails to materialize. There are very real moments when God worries. We note such a moment when the man Job, on whom God had counted, failed to come through like one of the mighty warriors but instead kept himself to the sidelines like the sons of Reuben in the days of Deborah.

God spoke of the large animals, the Behemoth and Leviathan. It is foolish to think here only of the hippo or the crocodile! Rather it was exactly the mythical accent that added a fantastic touch but by reducing these prehistoric animals to the occupants of a modern zoo, this accent becomes lost. This well-meant ‘explanation’, thought up by congenial but short-sighted specialists, can only do damage to our understanding of the book of Job.

These animals, which were already extinct in the days of Job, were in fact more colossal than their portrayal in the myths . Certainly it was foolish to deify such animals even though they were impressively immense, as phenomenal as the prehistoric ages that preceded the advent of humans. They became extinct possibly during the earliest centuries of human existence and probably even before. God created these huge beasts for His own pleasure and when it pleased Him He removed them from the earth.

This time Job understood more about his amazing God and he must also have been moved by the distress he caused God. It is not helpful here to introduce ideas about God being

omnipotent and omniscient and outside of time for He meets people on their own ground. He meets us in our humanity. God struggled with Job just as he struggled with Jacob. He still enters our time and life. Of course we do not understand it at all but God's word cannot be broken or be put aside. The lofty God entered the drama of Job and became distressed about the role that Job was playing.

When God instructed Job by reminding him about the overwhelmingly immense and extinct animals, so big that people called them supernatural, God used even this human error as a visual aid in His teaching! Job suddenly took the big step for which the Lord had been waiting. He stepped prophetically into a new era. He repented and this repentance was more than a daily repentance; it marked a transition point in his life. What he received from God's instruction was so new that he was able to say that now, for the very first time he had seen who God really is.

He acquired this insight because God spoke to him about the large animals.

Thus, these prehistoric animals, called Behemoth and Leviathan, had helped Job accomplish his task: to carry forward the witness of God's Word revelation right up to the very gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.