

The Error of Eliphaz

This is not to isolate Eliphaz from the others in the book of Job; there is blame enough to go around. But I select Eliphaz for special attention because it was his error which I want to highlight tonight. More about that later.

ERRONEOUS VIEWS ON THE BOOK OF JOB

I have always wanted to do a lesson on Job, in part because I have heard some erroneous teaching about the book throughout my years. Some of the errors I have heard:

“THE BOOK OF JOB EXPLAINS WHY PEOPLE SUFFER” — While suffering is evident throughout the book of Job, it is never explained unless we use what happened to Job to apply to all people universally. But that is not possible. For one thing, Job was a believer and the reasons why things happen to a believer may be worlds apart from why things happen to unbelievers. And unless we are prepared to state the only reason ‘good people’ suffer is because God challenges Satan to test that goodness, we may not even state Job is typical of a believer suffering. Therefore *I believe the book of Job addresses issues higher than why you and I go through difficulties and any ‘suffering’ in the book of Job is secondary to the real issues.* What those real issues may be will be delineated throughout this lesson.

However since suffering is prominent throughout the book of Job and every commentary on this book does discuss suffering in some manner, it would be worthwhile to note some items regarding the topic. B. H. Carroll gives a brief synopsis why people suffer: (gleaned from B. H. Carroll, An Interpretation of the English Bible, vol 2, “The Poetical Books of the Bible”, pp 88ff)

- **PENAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL** – sometimes we suffer as punishment for sin. “*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*” (Gal 6:7)
- **DISCIPLINARY OR PREPARATORY** – The term ‘disciplinary’ is used in the positive sense of disciplining, of preparing for future purposes; e.g., the suffering of Israel in Egypt preparing them for the Promised Land; Joseph in prison preparing him for leadership under Pharaoh; etc.
- **EXEMPLARY** – suffering may be a testimony to others; in the case of Job: “*Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*” (James 5:11)
- **PREPARATION OF REVELATION** – Sometimes suffering is designed to show the need of revelation before it is given. Suffering caused Job to realize the need of a number of things that he never could have realized without the suffering, and that he could not have understood without revelation. He was not able to solve the problem of his own suffering without it. “*Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.... I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*” (42:1,2,5,6)
- **TYPICAL** – Job’s suffering was typical of the Messiah’s suffering in that it was brought upon him by the devil. As Job was in the hands of the devil so was our Lord in his great agony on the cross. The proof that Job’s sufferings were typical of the Messiah’s sufferings is seen from the fact that David (Ps 22) and Isaiah (Isa 53) used the words of Job in describing the sufferings of Christ.
- **NEVER EXPIATORY** – Suffering can never atone for sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) and the only atonement for sin possible is the expiatory death of the Son of God on the behalf of sinners (Rom 3:23-26). This refutes those who sentimentally attaches worth to earthly suffering to heavenly blessings, e.g., “He suffered so much on this earth, therefore he must now be at the peace he so justly deserved.” Unless that person was forgiven by the blood of Christ, death only increased his suffering and did not remove it. Even the death of the unbeliever is not enough to ever atone for his own sins; the unsaved sinner will die physically and will be eternally punished for his sins yet even “after” an eternity of suffering (I use the term “after” although to our finite understanding there is no such thing as anything “after” eternity!) his sins will still be charged to his account and he will still be separated from our God. Once a sinner dies without Christ, there is no escape from damnation which will never end.

“JOB BROUGHT THE PROBLEMS UPON HIMSELF” (THE ‘HEALTH AND WEALTH’ TEACHING) — The book of Job presents problems for that branch of Charismatics who teach ‘the Lord always wants you to be healthy and wealthy and any lack of these things are due to sin in the life of the believer’. But the Lord Himself calls Job ‘righteous’ yet Job suffered. How do they account for such a contradiction to their teaching? To counter the obvious teaching of the book of Job, the Charismatics use the following verse: “*For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.*” (3:25) They therefore reason as thus: ‘*That Job was afraid of his loss of property and family evidences a lack of faith and therefore is the reason for those events happening.*’ **To go to such an extreme to justify their core doctrine is sad and evidences a total lack of knowledge of the book of Job.** Proof against their teaching will be shown throughout tonight’s lesson as to the purpose of the book of Job.

“JOB DID NOT SIN THROUGHOUT HIS TESTING” — There are those who approach the book of Job as if Job persevered through it all. Not so. Job’s actual sin will be discussed below but here let us consider the comments from the Lord when He finally appears to defend Himself. The two discourses of the Lord are addressed to Job, not Job’s friends. In the Lord’s first discourse, He singles out Job twice:

“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said ...” (38:1)

“Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said ...” (40:1)

After the first discourse it is Job that responds, not his friends:

“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.” (40:3-5)

The Lord again addresses Job directly as He begins His second discourse:

“Then answered the LORD unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said ...” (40:6)

After the second discourse it was Job again who answers alone:

“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (42:1-6)

After the Lord’s two discourses and Job’s responses, a distinction is now made between Job and his friends:

“And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.” (42:7)

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JOB

Book of Job structured very symmetrically, composed of sets of twos, threes and fours: (the overview, analysis and many of the comments on Job’s sin taken from *The Book of Job: New International Commentary on the OT* by John E. Hartley)

I. The Prologue (chaps 1,2)

A Introduction of Job (1:1-5)	
B The First Heavenly Scene (1:6-12)	B' The Second Heavenly Scene (2:1-7a)
C Job’s Misfortune (1:13-22)	C' Job’s Physical Affliction (2:7b-10)
A' Introduction of the Three Friends (2:11-13)	

II. Job’s Curse – Lament (chap 3)

III. The Dialogues (chaps 4-27)

A The First Cycle (chaps 4-14)	B The Second Cycle (chaps 15-21)	C The Third Cycle (chaps 22-27)
Eliphaz (chaps 4,5)	Eliphaz (chap 15)	Eliphaz (chap 22)
Job (chaps 6,7)	Job (chaps 16,17)	Job (chaps 23,24)
Bildad (chap 8)	Bildad (chap 18)	Bildad (chap 25)
Job (chaps 9,10)	Job (chap 19)	Job (chaps 26-27)
Zophar (chap 11)	Zophar (chap 20)	
Job (chaps 12-14)	Job (chap 21)	

(Note: Hartley makes a division in Job’s response during the third cycle: instead of listing Job as the source of the entire 27th chapter, Hartley argues that Bildad speaks in chap 25, Job in chaps 26 – 27:12, and then Bildad concludes in chap 27:13-23. Francis Anderson in his commentary [*Job: Tyndale OT Commentaries*] notes that it has been popular for the last two centuries to deny that Job spoke 27:13-23, most commonly designating that portion as “Zophar’s lost third speech”. Anderson affirms the entire chap 27 to come from the lips of Job; I agree and make that distinction above.)

IV. The Hymn to Wisdom (chap 28)

V. Job’s Avowal of Innocence (chaps 29-31)

- A Job's Remembrance (chap 29)
- B A Lament (chap 30)
- C An Oath of Innocence (chap 31)

VI. The Elihu Speeches (chaps 32-37)

VII. The Theophany (chaps 38 – 42:6)

A Yahweh's First Speech (chaps 38 – 40:2)	A' Yahweh's Second Speech (chaps 40 – 41)
B Job's Response (chap 40:3-5)	B' Job's Response (chap 42:1-6)

VIII. The Epilogue (chap 42:7-17)

- A Judgment on Friends (chap 42:7-9)
- B Yahweh's Blessing on Job (chap 42:10-17)

SYNOPSIS OF JOB'S THREE FRIENDS' COUNSEL — Below is general synopsis of what Job's three friends had to say to Job.

<i>First Cycle</i>			
<i>genre</i>	<i>Eliphaz</i>	<i>Bildad</i>	<i>Zophar</i>
word of consolation	4:2-6		
accusation		8:2-4	11:2-6
wisdom instruction	4:7-11	8:8-10	
fate of wicked	5:1-7	8:11-15	
fate of upright	5:17-28	8:16-22	
praise of God	5:9-16		11:7-12
exhortations to seek God	5:8,27	8:5-7	11:13-20
<i>Second Cycle</i>			
accusation	15:2-6	18:2-4	20:2,3
wisdom instruction	15:7-16		
fate of wicked	15:17-35	18:5-21	20:4-29
<i>Third Cycle</i>			
accusation	22:2-9		
threat	22:10,11		
praise of God	22:12	25:2-6	
disputation	22:13-20		
call to repentance	22:21-30		

“In the first cycle the friends seek to console Job by recounting to him the just and wise ways of God. They juxtapose descriptions of the calamity that befalls the wicked with those of the blessings that attend the righteous. These descriptions function both as a warning of impending doom and as an exhortation for Job to repent. In defense of their instruction the friends quote hymnic lines in praise of God's power and wisdom. They also exhort Job to seek God, promising him prosperity, security, and joy.

“In the second cycle the friends, suspecting that Job must have done something seriously wrong to be so afflicted, omit any words of consolation as they deliver harsh accusations against him. Each of them describes the terrible fate that awaits the evildoer as a powerful warning that he must forsake his evil course. Absent from this cycle are hymnic lines in praise of God and calls to repentance; the friends concentrate on trying to convince Job that he is numbered among the wicked.

“In the third cycle Eliphaz directly accuses Job of specific sins, and adds a threat about his precarious circumstances. He quotes

briefly from a hymn and then proceeds to dispute with Job about the fate of the wicked. He concludes with a vivid, energetic call to repentance. Next, Bildad merely quotes from a hymn in praise of God's majesty....

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESPONSES OF JOB TO HIS THREE FRIENDS — “Through his lamenting Job reveals the depth of his agony. He not only laments his own suffering, but he groans over human suffering in general (7:1-3; 14:1-12). The generalizing tendencies in his laments allow all people to identify with Job. In the hymnic segments Job alludes to the primordial conflict between God and the forces of chaos (e.g., 9:13; 26:12-13). In this way he addresses the cosmic dimensions of his trial and reinforces his belief that God is master over all forces, terrestrial and cosmic. *Sorely troubled that his affliction witnesses to some wrongdoing, Job ponders how he can demand that God vindicate him. Thus he draws on the language of a lawsuit to confront God.* Thinking of litigation against God, he affirms his own innocence. Also, out of faith he states his trust in God as the one who will prove his innocence.” [Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 39ff]

Lament	description of suffering: 6:2-4; 11-13; 7:3-6; 9:25-28; 10:1; 16:6-17; 17:1-2; 6-9; 19:13-20; 23:2 apprehensive fear: of death: 13:28; 14:18-22; 17:11-16; of God: 23:15-17 sorrow at general human suffering: 7:1-2; 14:1-12 justification of lamenting: 6:5-7 complaint against friends: 6:14-27; 12:2-6; 13:1-3; 16:2-5; 17:10; 19:2-6; 21:34; 26:2-4 complaint against God: 7:7-21; 9:17-18, 21-24; 10:2-7, 13-17; 16:7-14; 19:7-12
Lawsuit	with friends: 13:4-12 with God: 9:2-4, 14-16, 19-20, 28b, 29-33; 13:13-17 (purposed), 18-27; 23:3-7 (wish)
Petition to the friends	6:28-29; 19:21-22
Petition to God	wish to die: 6:8-10; 7:15 wish for some relief before death: 7:7-10, 16-21; 10:18-22; 14:5-6, 13-17 request for easing of suffering so he can dispute with God: 9:34-35; 13:20-21 plea for vindication: 16:18; 17:3-4; 19:23-24 plea for deliverance from enemies: 27:7-10
Hymnic lines in praise of God	9:5-13; 10:8-12; 12:13-25; 23:8-9, 13-14; 26:5-14
Avowal of innocence	6:28-30; 16:17; 23:10-12; 27:2-6
Affirmation of trust in God	16:19-22; 19:25-27; 23:6-7
Wisdom instruction	12:7-12
Warning to friends	17:5; 19:28-29
Disputation on the success of wicked	21:2-33; 24:1-17 (followed by a curse on the wicked, 24:18-24, and a challenge to be proven wrong, 24:25)

SYNOPSIS OF ELIHU'S SPEECHES —

<i>Elihu's Speeches</i>				
	<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>	<i>Fourth</i>
introductory apology	32:6-22			
an apology or exhortation to listen	33:1-7	34:2-4		
the presentation of Job's position	33:8-11	34:5-9	35:2-4	
a disputation or instruction	33:12-30	34:10-30	35:5-15	36:2-21
an invitation for Job to answer or a judgment	33:31-33	34:34-37	35:16	
a hymnic description of a theophony				36:22-37:24

SYNOPSIS OF THE LORD’S RESPONSES TO JOB — The first speech of Lord counters Job’s accusation that Yahweh fails to administer the world justly, second speech challenges Job to surrender his case before the all-powerful ruler of universe. Both speeches contain the same elements (although in a different order):

prosaic introduction	38:1	40:6
exhortation to Job	38:2-3	40:7
interrogation of Job	38:4-39:30	40:15-41:34
challenge to Job	40:2	40:8-14

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF JOB

The basic tension is between Job’s belief in God and his personal experience. In the beginning these two dimensions of human existence are in harmony for Job:



After the heavenly discourses between the Lord and Satan, Satan is permitted to afflict Job. Job remains faithful despite his losses and debilitating illnesses but now his experience is no longer in harmony with his belief:



Job’s friends come to comfort Job but are troubled by the severity of Job’s afflictions. They first attempt to console Job but become deeply offended by Job stubbornly holding onto his innocence and accusing God. The friends’ comfort rapidly becomes accusatory and pleas for repentance which Job rejects. *NOTE: the failure of the friends at this point is a belief that the harmony which was Job’s initial state is the only state possible.*



“Job’s experience of undeserved suffering makes him apprehensive that God may be a ruthless tyrant rather than a merciful Lord. His conviction that he is innocent leads him to call God’s justice into question. Therefore, he decides that if he could enter into litigation with God, God would confirm his innocence. But he is apprehensive that God will overpower him. Nevertheless, his conviction that God is just prods him to pursue a lawsuit with God. Job also knows that in court he must have a witness to testify on his behalf, a witness more credible than the condemning testimony of his body. At this point Job’s faith in God rises above his experience of suffering, leading him to declare that God is his Witness (16:19), even his Redeemer (19:25-27), whose testimony will vindicate him. Still, his pain terrorizes him and his dread is compounded by God’s silence.

When the Lord does answer Job, God does not address Job’s claim to innocence. Rather God accuses Job of darkening counsel. Whereas Job demands God show cause for his affliction, God questions Job about his knowledge of the world He has created. The Lord’s discourses at first does not seem to address the issues at hand, but they do. Instead of explaining to Job why He has inflicted him, God recounts the marvelous way He has created the world and the wise, judicious way He governs it. If God can both expand Job’s understanding of how God governs and show Job the limitations of the human understanding of world order, God can persuade Job that it is possible to believe that His is just and merciful, caring for every creature. God finishes by challenging Job to ‘don regal garments’ and rule the world justly, subduing the proud and the wicked (illustrated in Behemoth and Leviathan). If Job cannot rule more justly than God, he will forfeit his case against the Lord.

Job now realizes that to pursue his lawsuit against God, after God has reasoned with him, would be to stand in outright rebellion against God. Job therefore acknowledges God’s complete lordship over his life by humbly surrendering himself to God.

THE SIN OF JOB — While none here tonight would throw stones at Job and while we all may understand why Job said what he did under such extreme circumstances, Job did sin in his accusations of the Lord. *“Job continues his lament by directly accusing God of causing his ills. Shifting to second person forms, Job addresses God directly, complaining that no matter how much he cries out to him for help God not only remains heedless to his petitions but also punishes him more cruelly. Job fears that God is bringing him to the chambers of death.* Only in [chapter 30 vv. 20-23] of this entire speech does Job address God directly. Not surprisingly, these verses are at the virtual center of this long speech.” [Hartley, p 402] Let us take a brief look at what Job accuses of the Lord: (all commentary gleaned from Hartley, p 402ff)

“Job grieves over the pain that continually pierces his body. He feels that his soul, his vitality, has been poured out like water from a jar. All that is left is a limp body, throbbing with pain. He has no strength left to fight his compounding illness.”

And now my soul is poured out upon me; the days of affliction have taken hold upon me. My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest. (30:16, 17)

“Since every part of his body aches, Job imagines that God has grabbed him by his clothing and pulled it so tightly about him that every part of his body screams out in agonizing pain. He feels as though he were confined in a straitjacket that is gripping

him tighter and tighter. Or it seems that God is girding him with a girdle which is no wider than the collar of his tunic. When God puts the girdle on him, it binds him so tightly that he cannot breathe.”

By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat. (30:18)

“After emaciating Job’s body, God has cast him into the mire to disgrace him.”

He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes. (30:19)

“Job protests that though he has fervently petitioned God for relief, God remains silent. With determination and a sense of urgency he stands to make his plea for help, but still God fails to acknowledge him.”

I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. (30:20)

“Job complains boldly that God has grown cruel toward him. Because he has assailed Job with such might, Job believes that God acts hatefully (*śātām*) against him. Mostly likely the author is making a play on the verb *śātām*, ‘act hatefully,’ and the title Satan (*śātān*). God has acted so bitterly against him that Job feels that God is his foe, his satan. That is, Job is poignantly accusing God of cherishing animosity against him.”

Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me [you act hatefully against me]. (30:21)

“Job continues his complaint by making a parody on the hymnic language that pictures God as riding on the wings of the wind when he comes to deliver his people (cf. Ps 18:10). Turning this metaphor upside down, Job sarcastically complains: *you [God] ... mount me on the wind; you toss me about with a tempest*. Job says, *I know that you will bring me to death*, i.e., Job knows that God is wearing him down before he brings him to death.... The opening formula *I know* is used sarcastically. It contrasts with Job’s great affirmation of faith in 19:25. Here his knowledge comes out of hopelessness and fear, not out of faith. In this way Job is venting his bitter frustration at the way he feels God is treating him.”

Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance. For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living. (30:22, 23)

“Job has assumed that whenever one who faces disaster cries out to God for help, God will extend to him a saving hand, not a hand stretched out to inflict another blow. But instead of showing him kindness, God has increased his affliction. No wonder Job can hardly believe God’s abusive behavior. His experience shakes deeply his firmest convictions about God’s goodness.”

Howbeit he will not stretch out his hand to the grave, though they cry in his destruction. (30:24)

With rhetorical questions Job accuses God of failing to act toward him as Job has acted towards others. When Job saw someone in trouble, Job wept for them. When Job saw the poor he grieved for them. Job therefore expected God to reciprocate his deeds of mercy with blessing. Instead God gave evil for good, darkness for light.

Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness. (30:25,26)

THE ERROR OF ELIPHAZ

Why did Job sin? What is essentially incorrect with Job’s and his three friends’ concept of God? This brings us to the title of the lesson. Francis Anderson made this observation in his commentary on the book of Job:

“It is hard to find anything wrong with Eliphaz’s theology. Delitzsch rightly says: ‘The skill [of Eliphaz] is proved by the difficulty which the expositor has in detecting that which is false in the speech of Eliphaz.’ Where is the defect? Why does the Lord say to Eliphaz in the end (42:7) — He singles him out from the others — *‘My anger flares up against you ... because what you say about me isn’t correct’*?

“Eliphaz’s fault is not that his doctrine is unsound; it is his ineptness as a counselor. True words may be thin medicine for a man in the depths. It is not that Job is at present rationally inaccessible, to be treated as a neurotic. His depression is legitimate and wholesome. The reality that God has given him is poverty and sickness. It is not a return to truth to deflect his mind to a promise of health, while he is scratching himself on his ash-heap; to promise him wealth, while the brigands make off with his animals; to give him dreams of numerous descendants, while his children lie crushed by the fallen stones. ***Eliphaz has done his best, with the best of the old theology. But the author of Job is about to take giant new strides into a vaster, but more mysterious, understanding of God. By binding God to certain rules, Eliphaz safeguards His morality. But to bring God under obligation to a morality beyond His will is a threat to His sovereignty, especially when it is a man who thinks he knows what that morality should be.***

“Job believes that God, as Sovereign, may give or retrieve His gifts at His pleasure (1:21b); He may send good or bad (2:10b). He is not accountable to any man for such actions. Eliphaz thinks he knows how to get along with a predictable (and that means, to some extent, manageable) God. Job, who has no such pretensions, faces the agony of getting along with a God over whom he has absolutely no control or even influence.”

THE ERROR OF ELIPHAZ IS THAT GOD IS A DETERMINISTIC AND THEREFORE A “MANAGEABLE” GOD — In PLC software, once code is written it is what we call ‘*deterministic*’; i.e., if a certain set of conditions are met, something will happen without fail every time. For example, suppose a machine had a motor (motor #2) that could be used to move something. A simple line of PLC software code could be written as follows:

DOOR SWITCH MOTOR #1 START MOTOR PB MOTOR #2
OFF RUN

———] [—————] [—————] [—————()———

What that means is that in order for motor #2 to turn on, first a safety door switch must be closed (to make sure no one is around the parts which will move when the motor starts), another motor must be off (motor #1, possibly because it would damage the equipment or hurt someone if both motors were running at the same time), and someone must press a pushbutton to start the motor #2. With this line of code therefore, if (1) the door switch is closed, and (2) the motor #1 is off, and (3) someone presses the start pushbutton, motor #2 will start. Every time. It will never fail. As long as those three conditions are met, motor #2 will start. If we left the machine for one hundred years and came back and those three conditions were met, that motor #2 would still start (assuming the parts were all still working and the electricity was still present)! ***It is deterministic! It will happen every time as long as those conditions are met!***

Suppose someone came up to start the motor #2 and pushed the start pushbutton but someone had left the safety door open. Therefore even though motor #1 was not running and the start pushbutton was pressed, the motor #2 would not start because one of the conditions was not met: the safety door was left open. ***Again, that is deterministic! All three conditions were not met and therefore the motor #2 would not start!***

Some people treat God like that:

if I tithe, God will always bless us materially (“*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*” – Mal 3:10)

if I fail to support God’s work, God will remove material blessings from us (“*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” – Matt 6:33)

if I pray and teach my children about God, they will all be saved and serve the Lord (“*But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children*” – Ps 103:17)

if children do not serve the Lord, it is because of some failings upon the part of the parents (“*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” – Prov 22:6)

if I pray God promises to answer my prayers as long as I don’t have sin in my heart (“*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*” – Matt 7:7,8)

if I honor my parents I will have long life (“*Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*” – Exod 20:12)

The list could obviously continue as we consider all the promises of the Lord to His people. ***The problem with such a mind-set is that we are treating God as an impersonal power or force, one which always acts in the same manner***, much like our software PLC example: “*If we do X and Y and Z then God promises*” The contrast is also true: “*If we do not receive the promise, then somehow we have failed at X or Y or Z.*”

God is a Personal God, One which has intellect, emotion and will! Since God is not a ‘force’ nor a ‘power’, He makes choices and decisions. Therefore we cannot control God, manage God or think of Him as ‘bound’ by what we consider our morality!

THE ‘MANAGEABLE’ GOD AND HEBREWS 11:6 — I have long been impressed with the statement of faith found in Heb 11:6, “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” The text is fairly straight-forward: the author of Hebrews is telling us that faith is required to be pleasing to God in any aspect. The surprise comes as we consider the author’s elaboration. The first is the easier of the two. “*For he that cometh to God must believe that He is*”. That makes sense to us all. We cannot see God, we never have seen God, and we will never see the Lord until He either sends His Son back to earth or until He calls us home to heaven in death. Therefore for us to accept and trust this God requires faith in the Word of God. That is faith. That is trust. We can understand that part.

What is amazing / puzzling / shocking however is the author’s second elaboration on this faith: “*For he that cometh to God must believe ... that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” ***The author is saying it takes faith to accept that God will reward those that seek Him.*** Now, why would that be an example of faith? Would not that be obvious? Even little children are taught at a very early age that God is good and it is best to live for Him and not for ourselves. That is the most basic Sunday School material. Even the unsaved believe that God, if there is a God, will be a good Being. In fact as we will see later in this lesson, the fact that bad things happen is one reason why some deny the existence of God: ‘*God must be a good God, bad things happen, therefore there is no God.*’ Simplistic but at least they grasp the most basic concept of God that He is good. So why is this used as an elaboration on faith?

The answer to that is staggering, at least to my mind, and it hit me hard the first time the Lord opened my heart to this truth. *The reason why believing that God rewards those who seek Him is an example of faith must be because we do not always see that in this life! Some people will trust the Lord, seek the Lord with all their hearts, pray, humble themselves, serve Him and yet have problems and difficulties possibly far beyond those who live ungodly! Since by our eyes we SEE that being obedient to the Lord does not always bring blessings, as testified in the lives of some we know and may have discovered in our own lives, it is FAITH which trusts the Lord and believes that living for Him will ultimately be rewarded! It takes FAITH to believe God is good!*

HAVE WE JUST REMOVED ALL HOPE IN THE PROMISES OF GOD? — As I reviewed these notes and considered the intent of this lesson, one thought came to my mind which might be given by one in the audience: *‘Thanks, Bro Meadows. What you just taught me is that I can no longer claim any promise of God and expect Him to answer!’* That was never my intent and hopefully that is not the result of any hearing / reading this. Rather the direction I believe the Lord would have us go is for us to **re-think how God fulfills His promises:**

- We are to search, study, pray and find the truths and promises of the scriptures
- We are to take the Lord at His word and even claim His promises (I believe God is honored when we ‘remind’ the Lord of what He has promised and trust in Him to bring that promise to fulfilment)
- But I also believe *we must have a view of God which does not constrain His sovereignty and choices in any given situation.* Yes we must learn His promises and yes, we are to cling to those promises and even use those promises as a ‘prayer-prompter’. *But we are not ‘controlling’ the Lord, we cannot ‘manipulate’ the Lord, we cannot put the Lord in such a box that He is constrained to answer in such-and-such a manner.*

To reiterate: *we are to LEARN His promises, REMIND the Lord in prayer of His promises and trust in Him to fulfill those promises, but have the FAITH that the Lord will answer His promises at such a time and in such a manner that it pleases Him! We are to CLING to His promises even if we do not see Him answering His promises! That is faith, that is the ultimate trust, and I believe that is one of the major thrusts of the book of Job:*

Regardless of what happens, we are not to doubt His goodness nor doubt His Word!

GIVEN THE TEST, WE WOULD ALL FAIL AT THIS POINT — I teach this evening with fear and trembling. I believe and stand behind everything I have taught tonight but I also see my fallen heart and my feet of clay. I would hate to have the Devil go to the Lord and say, *‘See? Do you hear what he is saying? Go ahead try him out!’* If the Lord would ever bring testing of that sort to any of our lives, may He give us the grace to endure such a trial. But I do not think any of us here this evening would volunteer for such a test! *Perhaps the best any of us would confess is that this is a growing thing in each of our lives. None of us would state we are beyond temptation or falling in this area. We can see this truth taught in the scriptures; the difficulty lies in us believing it. May we all pray for each other as we are tried in these areas throughout our lives.*

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN SUFFERING IS TIED TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES — “Strictly speaking, human misery, or the larger sum of evil in all its forms, is a problem only for the person who believes in one God who is all-powerful and all-loving. Outside such faith there are many explanations of evil which involve a denial, or a limitation, of either God’s sovereignty or of His goodness. The argument has been expressed with philosophical clarity as follows: If God were perfectly good, He could not tolerate the existence of violence, disease, etc.; therefore there must be some limit to His ability to control such events, that is, He is not almighty. Alternatively, if God does have complete power over everything that happens, His failure to curb the wrongs that occur must be due to the fact that He does not see anything wrong in them, that is, He is not good.

“Many thoughtful people, horrified by the helplessness of humanity in the face of natural disasters or outraged by the ruthless exploitation of ‘the downtrodden and the injured’ by the unscrupulous masters of political or economic power, have lost faith in the goodness of God. ‘If I had the power of God,’ they protest, ‘I could do more about these things than He seems to be doing!’

“A reasoned theodicy – the justification of the ways of God to men – is a legitimate task for Christian apologetics. The book of Job is not such a treatise, but the story of one man, his loss, his search and his discovery. This search takes place entirely within the household of faith. All the characters, the three friends and Elihu as much as Job himself, are fully committed to belief in one supreme God who is unquestionably just in all His acts. Solutions which lie outside such biblical revelation are not even considered in the book of Job.” [Anderson, Job, p64]

Suffering is not a problem for someone who accepts one of these errors:

Polytheism	each god not omnipotent; his domain is limited
Dualism	a good God is at war with an evil god, both of equal power
Arminianism / Pelagianism	whether admitted or not, they accept a mild form of dualism

Naturalism / Humanism	denies God, some because of the very reasons we are examining tonight; anything that happens is purely accidental or “fate”, no rhyme nor reason to anything
Deism	God is sovereign but wound up the universe and is now in a “hands-off” mode
Eastern Religions	accidents and evil are results of past sins, even in another life (“bad karma”); the reversal of inequalities of one existence is compensated in some future reincarnation

“Mr. H. G. Wells has said that, *faced with what we see around us in the world, we are forced to conclude either that God has the power and does not care, or that God cares but does not have the power. The logic is incomplete. There is a third possibility which is most certainly the expression of Biblical thought. It is that God both cares and has the power, but that He is planning something which demands the coming chaos of man’s world in order to demonstrate to all that help is to be found in Himself alone. God knows that the world is in a terrible condition. God has the power to alter it, but will not do so today because of His greater purpose.*

God cares tremendously. This is evident in Calvary.

But He knows that His care can be manifest today only to the select company of individuals who have accepted the principles that rise from His eternal decrees. These admit the principle of their own spiritual bankruptcy and have turned utterly to the Lord Jesus Christ as God’s one and only answer to the problem. There is a sense, therefore, in which God does not exercise any care over the rebels who people this world. Something of this is seen in the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine’ (John 17:9). This is what Mr. Wells saw without the spiritual insight to understand. This is why the wordlings, seeing the disasters of human suffering, draw the conclusion that God is not caring for His creation. They do not understand God; they do not understand the meaning of care, and they do not understand the difference between the creatures who refuse the Lordship of God and those who have bowed to it in Christ and have thus become the children of God.” [Barnhouse, *Invisible War*, p 94f]

GOD IS DOING “A THOUSAND THINGS AT ONCE” IN THE LIFE OF HIS PEOPLE — While God does use trials and difficulties to guide and direct our lives, we must be careful to not make judgment calls such as, “God is afflicting this person due to sin in their lives” vs. “that person is living in the will of God therefore these difficulties is a ‘Satan trying the righteous’ – type of activity.” True, God chastises His children and corrects all who belong to Him (Heb 12:6) but honestly, regardless of how we may be living at the start of a trial, isn’t it true there are always things in a believer’s life which could and should be corrected? Where and when does it stop? Are trials and sufferings only chastisement for the “big sins” and the Lord winks at our “little sins”? As we saw in this lesson, Job did enter this trial in good standing with the Lord (that is undeniable in this case since the Lord Himself makes that assertion in Job 1:8; 2:3) but little things in his life did come forth as a result of his trials. That is true of us all.

SPURGEON, ‘MORNING AND EVENING’ ON THE BOOK OF JOB

“Doth Job fear God for nought?” — Job 1:9

This was the wicked question of Satan concerning that upright man of old, but there are many in the present day concerning whom it might be asked with justice, for they love God after a fashion because He prospers them; but if things went ill with them, they would give up all their boasted faith in God. If they can clearly see that since the time of their supposed conversion the world has gone prosperously with them, then they will love God in their poor carnal way; but if they endure adversity, they rebel against the Lord. Their love is the love of the table, not of the host; a love to the cupboard, not to the master of the house. As for the true Christian, he expects to have his reward in the next life, and to endure hardness in this. The promise of the old covenant is adversity. Remember Christ’s words — “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit” — What? “He purgeth it, that it may bring forth fruit.” If you bring forth fruit, you will have to endure affliction. “Alas!” you say, “that is a terrible prospect.” But this affliction works out such precious results, that the Christian who is the subject of it must learn to rejoice in tribulations, because as his tribulations abound, so his consolations abound by Christ Jesus. Rest assured, if you are a child of God, you will be no stranger to the rod. Sooner or later every bar of gold must pass through the fire. Fear not, but rather rejoice that such fruitful times are in store for you, for in them you will be weaned from earth and made meet for heaven; you will be delivered from clinging to the present, and made to long for those eternal things which are so soon to be revealed to you. When you feel that as regards the present you do serve God for nought, you will then rejoice in the infinite reward of the future.

“Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.” — Job 10:2

Perhaps, O tried soul, the Lord is doing this to develop thy graces. There are some of thy graces which would never be discovered if it were not for thy trials. Dost thou not know that thy faith never looks so grand in summer weather as it does in winter? Love is too often like a glow-worm, showing but little light except it be in the midst of surrounding darkness. Hope itself is like a star — not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of adversity. Afflictions are often the black foils in which God doth set the jewels of His children’s graces, to make them shine the better. It was but a little while ago that on thy knees thou wast saying, “Lord, I fear I have no faith: let me know that I have faith.” Was not this really, though perhaps unconsciously, praying for

trials? — for how canst thou know that thou hast faith until thy faith is exercised? Depend upon it, God often sends us trials that our graces may be discovered, and that we may be certified of their existence. Besides, it is not merely discovery, real growth in grace is the result of sanctified trials. God often takes away our comforts and our privileges in order to make us better Christians. He trains His soldiers, not in tents of ease and luxury, but by turning them out and using them to forced marches and hard service. He makes them ford through streams, and swim through rivers, and climb mountains, and walk many a long mile with heavy knapsacks of sorrow on their backs. Well, Christian, may not this account for the troubles through which thou art passing? Is not the Lord bringing out your graces, and making them grow? Is not this the reason why He is contending with you?

“Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to His feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there.”

“O that I knew where I might find Him!” — Job 23:3

In Job’s uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father’s face. His first prayer is not “O that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!” nor even “O that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!” but the first and uppermost cry is, “O that I knew where I might find HIM, who is my God! that I might come even to His seat!” God’s children run home when the storm comes on. It is the heaven-born instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. “He that hath made his refuge God,” might serve as the title of a true believer. A hypocrite, when afflicted by God, resents the infliction, and, like a slave, would run from the Master who has scourged him; but not so the true heir of heaven, he kisses the hand which smote him, and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of the God who frowned upon him. Job’s desire to commune with God was intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. The patriarch turned away from his sorry friends, and looked up to the celestial throne, just as a traveller turns from his empty skin bottle, and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earth-born hopes, and cries, “O that I knew where I might find my God!” Nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator, as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. Turning away with bitter scorn from earth’s hives, where we find no honey, but many sharp stings, we rejoice in Him whose faithful word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. In every trouble we should first seek to realize God’s presence with us. Only let us enjoy His smile, and we can bear our daily cross with a willing heart for His dear sake.

“God, my Maker, who giveth songs in the night.” — Job 35:10

Any man can sing in the day. When the cup is full, man draws inspiration from it. When wealth rolls in abundance around him, any man can praise the God who gives a plenteous harvest or sends home a loaded argosy. It is easy enough for an Aeolian harp to whisper music when the winds blow — the difficulty is for music to swell forth when no wind is stirring. It is easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight; but he is skillful who sings when there is not a ray of light to read by — who sings from his heart. No man can make a song in the night of himself; he may attempt it, but he will find that a song in the night must be divinely inspired. Let all things go well, I can weave songs, fashioning them wherever I go out of the flowers that grow upon my path; but put me in a desert, where no green thing grows, and wherewith shall I frame a hymn of praise to God? How shall a mortal man make a crown for the Lord where no jewels are? Let but this voice be clear, and this body full of health, and I can sing God’s praise: silence my tongue, lay me upon the bed of languishing, and how shall I then chant God’s high praises, unless He Himself give me the song? No, it is not in man’s power to sing when all is adverse, unless an altar-coal shall touch his lip. It was a divine song, which Habakkuk sang, when in the night he said, “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Then, since our Maker gives songs in the night, let us wait upon Him for the music. O Thou chief musician, let us not remain songless because affliction is upon us, but tune Thou our lips to the melody of thanksgiving.

“Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?” — Job 38:31

If inclined to boast of our abilities, the grandeur of nature may soon show us how puny we are. We cannot move the least of all the twinkling stars, or quench so much as one of the beams of the morning. We speak of power, but the heavens laugh us to scorn. When the Pleiades shine forth in spring with vernal joy we cannot restrain their influences, and when Orion reigns aloft, and the year is bound in winter’s fetters, we cannot relax the icy bands. The seasons revolve according to the divine appointment, neither can the whole race of men effect a change therein. Lord, what is man?

In the spiritual, as in the natural world, man’s power is limited on all hands. When the Holy Spirit sheds abroad His delights in the soul, none can disturb; all the cunning and malice of men are ineffectual to stay the genial quickening power of the Comforter. When He deigns to visit a church and revive it, the most inveterate enemies cannot resist the good work; they may ridicule it, but they can no more restrain it than they can push back the spring when the Pleiades rule the hour. God wills it, and so it must be. On the other hand, if the Lord in sovereignty, or in justice, bind up a man so that he is in soul bondage, who can give him liberty? He alone can remove the winter of spiritual death from an individual or a people. He looses the bands of Orion, and none but He. What a blessing it is that He can do it. O that He would perform the wonder to-night. Lord, end my winter, and let my spring begin. I cannot with all my longings raise my soul out of her

death and dulness, but all things are possible with Thee. I need celestial influences, the clear shinings of Thy love, the beams of Thy grace, the light of Thy countenance, these are the Pleiades to me. I suffer much from sin and temptation, these are my wintry signs, my terrible Orion. Lord, work wonders in me, and for me. Amen.

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Eliphaz, Job and the Freedom of God

It is hard to find anything wrong with Eliphaz's theology. Delitzsch rightly says: "The skill [of Eliphaz] is proved by the difficulty which the expositor has in detecting that which is false in the speech of Eliphaz." Where is the defect? Why does the Lord say to Eliphaz in the end (42:7) — He singles him out from the others — *"My anger flares up against you ... because what you say about me isn't correct"*?

Eliphaz's fault is not that his doctrine is unsound; it is his ineptness as a counselor. True words may be thin medicine for a man in the depths. It is not that Job is at present rationally inaccessible, to be treated as a neurotic. His depression is legitimate and wholesome. The reality that God has given him is poverty and sickness. It is not a return to truth to deflect his mind to a promise of health, while he is scratching himself on his ash-heap; to promise him wealth, while the brigands make off with his animals; to give him dreams of numerous descendants, while his children lie crushed by the fallen stones. Eliphaz has done his best, with the best of the old theology. But the author of Job is about to take giant new strides into a vaster, but more mysterious, understanding of God. By binding God to certain rules, Eliphaz safeguards His morality. But to bring God under obligation to a morality beyond His will is a threat to His sovereignty, especially when it is a man who thinks he knows what that morality should be.

Job believes that God, as Sovereign, may give or retrieve His gifts at His pleasure (1:21b); He may send good or bad (2:10b). He is not accountable to any man for such actions. Eliphaz thinks he knows how to get along with a predictable (and that means, to some extent, manageable) God. Job, who has no such pretensions, faces the agony of getting along with a God over whom he has absolutely no control or even influence.

— Francis I. Anderson: *Job, An Introduction and Commentary*